HANNAH GADSBY · TKAY MAIDZA · FALLOUT · THE SMILE · L.A.B · 2024 MOVIE PREVIEW · FORTNITE · LILY GLADSTONE

MARCH – MAY 2024
ISSUE 016

Rolling Stone

AU/NZ

+

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN MUSIC
AMY TAYLOR
MIA WRAY
& MORE

WILL AI END CREATIVITY?

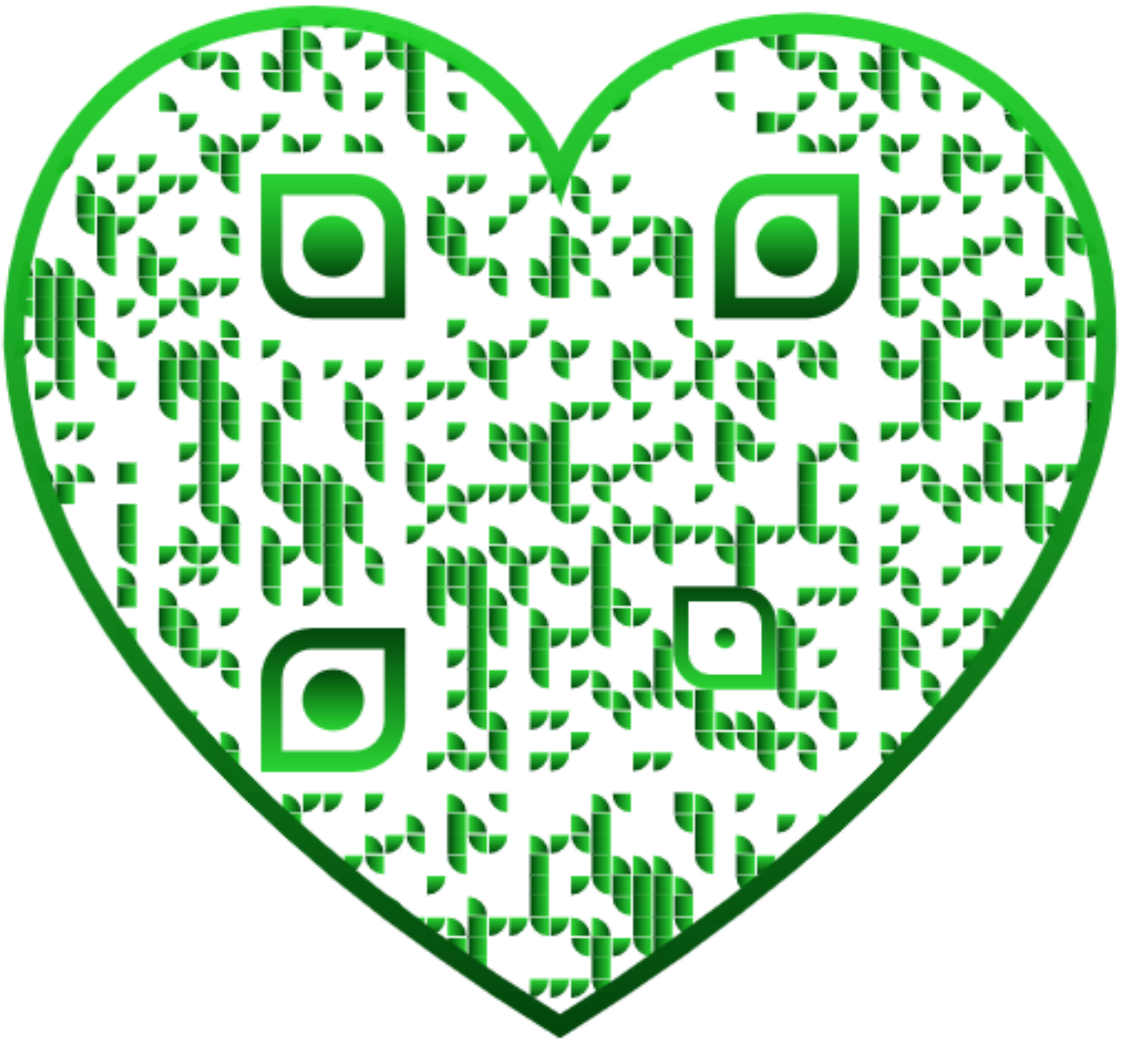
THE HUNT FOR TUPAC'S KILLER

AUSSIE MUSICIANS GOING GREEN

THE BEST TE REO MĀORI SONGS

HANNAH GADSBY

COMEDY'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL **ANTI-HERO**



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ANA POPOVIC (USA) ✦ ERIC BIBB (USA)
JON CLEARY & THE ABSOLUTE MONSTER GENTLEMEN (USA)
LLOYD SPIEGEL ✦ DALLAS FRASCA ✦ CHASE THE SUN
TAKE ME TO THE RIVER HI RHYTHM SECTION WITH BOO MITCHELL (USA)
8 BALL AITKEN & FRIENDS ALL STAR BLUES JAM

& MANY MORE

KURRAWA PARK SUNDAY TICKET

FAT FREDDY'S DROP (NZ)
TIJUANA CARTEL
BOOMCHILD PLUS GUESTS

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BLUESFEST'S SWEET NEW OPENER

Sailor Jerry

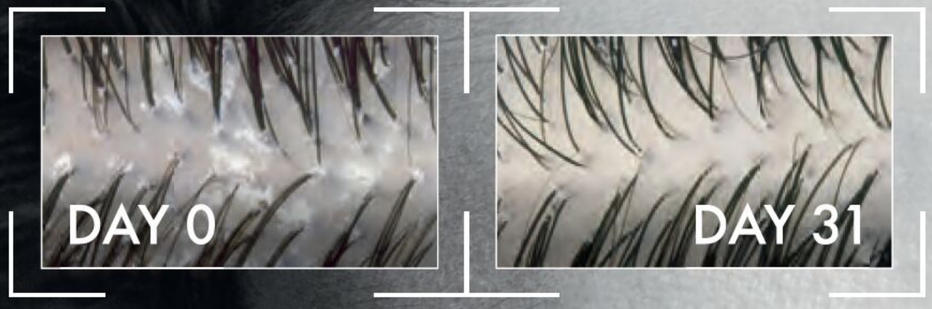
35TH ANNIVERSARY BYRON BAY BLUESFEST 2024
A CELEBRATION OF BLUES & ROOTS MUSIC & BEYOND

OFFICIAL RUM OF THE 35TH BLUESFEST ANNIVERSARY EASTER 2024

DON'T BE A DRUNKEN SAILOR. PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

UP TO
100% VISIBLE DANDRUFF ELIMINATED[1]

+ 6 WEEKS ANTI RELAPSE[2]



BEFORE/AFTER – SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN[3]

[1]Consumer test on 262 subjects after 2 weeks of regular use. [2]Cosmeto-clinical study on 45 subjects after 4 weeks of use and 6 weeks of remanence. [3]Cosmeto-clinical study on 45 subjects with 3 applications/ week, images corresponding to equivalent adherent dandruff scorage result. Individual results may vary. [4]Cosmeto-clinical study, 56 subjects with 3 applications a week for 4 weeks. [5]Survey conducted among the dermocosmetic market carried out by AplusA and other partners between January 2022 and May 2022, involving dermatologists in 32 countries, representing more than 80% of the worldwide GDP.

DERCOS

DERMATOLOGICAL SCALP & HAIR EXPERT

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AFTER 4 WEEKS

SCALP MICROBIOME IS REBALANCED[4]

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SONY MUSIC

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By John L. Smith

ARTIST **Amy Taylor**
PHOTOGRAPH BY **Michelle Pitiris**

RS
ISSUE 16

Females in Focus

Amy Taylor of Amyl and The Sniffers, Tkay Maidza, Tori Forsyth and more photographed for *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*.

By Michelle Pitiris

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Australian Government

A joint Australian, state and territory government initiative.

Who will you inspire?

→ BeThatTeacher.gov.au

BE THAT TEACHER

Authorised by the Australian Government, Canberra.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY **Michelle Pitiris**

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BY ALAN SEPINWALL

On the Cover

Hannah Gadsby, photographed on January 9th, 2024 at Tamale Studios, Melbourne, by **Charlie Ashfield** (@igotshotbycharlie).

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FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: CARLOS JARAMILLO; MICHELLE PITIRIS; NATHAN HUGHES; NIKO TAVERNISE / WARNER BROS.

Rolling Stone AU/NZ

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Editor's Letter

Crafting Culture Together

THERE'S A COMMON misconception about *Rolling Stone* – and no, it's not the one where we were named after The Rolling Stones. It's that we take full creative control of our cover photography. I assume some of the more cynical industry-watchers out there imagine us walking our cover stars hostage-style into a dressing room, giving them a few garments to wear and telling them to "trust the process" – with a delighted cackle thrown in for good measure.

In actual fact, what we do delight in at *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*, is collaboration. Whether it's our Creative Director Katie Taylor going to Amy Shark's home on the Gold Coast last year to sit down and ask, "How do you see yourself on our cover?"; or our September 2023 cover star Troye Sivan breaking the fourth wall in LA to stand behind a laptop with our team and select his favourite shots, we thrive on bringing talent into the creative process.

I can unequivocally say, hand on heart, that if we didn't have that approach to this magazine which is now in your beautiful hands (I assume everything about you is beautiful because you read *Rolling Stone*), this cover story wouldn't exist.

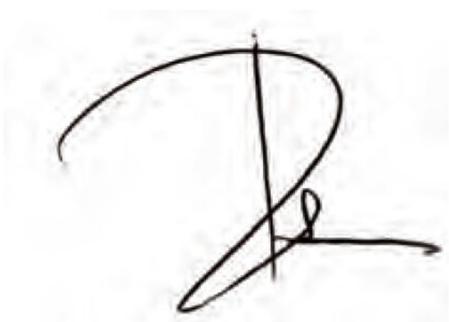
Hannah Gadsby is many wonderful things: a comedy catalyst, a disrupter, an honorary doctorate recipient, and an out, proud, and loud autistic person. Our team's usual approach to collaboration was taken to another level for this cover shoot. From reverse-engineered lighting to a sensory break room, to specific catering, we worked in partnership with Gadsby and their team at every step. We were led by their expertise in order to create a fun, unrushed and comfortable experience. I would personally like to thank Gadsby for allowing us to level up our collaborative skills with this cover shoot.

> "The job to elevate and spotlight culture custodians is one we'll never take for granted."

And in true Gadsby style, they did not hold back in their conversations with cover story writer Jenny Valentish. Valentish's piece puts Gadsbyland under the microscope and answers the existential question: where to now for comedy's *enfant terrible*?

As our first print issue of 2024, this magazine marks our first edition to feature a comedian on the cover, and it's our first under the guidance of our new Print Editor, James Jennings. Each issue is another opportunity to fulfil our mission to be a pop culture bible. Jennings took that responsibility with profound gravity, helping craft an edition which relays gaming's watershed moment (*How Game Music Turned Entertainment Into Art*); delves into AI and the threat it poses to human creativity; pays respects to Aotearoa's mother tongue (*Wonderful Waiata: 8 Memorable te reo Māori Songs*); and so much more.

Our goal is to deliver visual and editorial storytelling that is iconic, bold, and gives you the nuanced context only longform journalism can. This only works with collaboration, and collaboration only works with aligned intentions from all involved. You hold in your hands the product of the best kind of alliance, where the job to elevate and spotlight culture custodians is one we'll never take for granted.



POPPY REID
EDITOR IN CHIEF

ON THE COVER

HANNAH GADSBY FOR ROLLING STONE AU/NZ

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GOT A HOT NEWS TIP?

WE WANT TO HEAR IT.

Email us, confidentially, at tips@thebrag.media

** SEASONS WORLD TOUR 2024 **

THIRTY SECONDS TO MARS

THURSDAY 12 SEPTEMBER
ROD LAVER ARENA / MELBOURNE

SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER
QUDOS BANK ARENA / SYDNEY

TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER
RIVERSTAGE / BRISBANE

THURSDAY 19 SEPTEMBER
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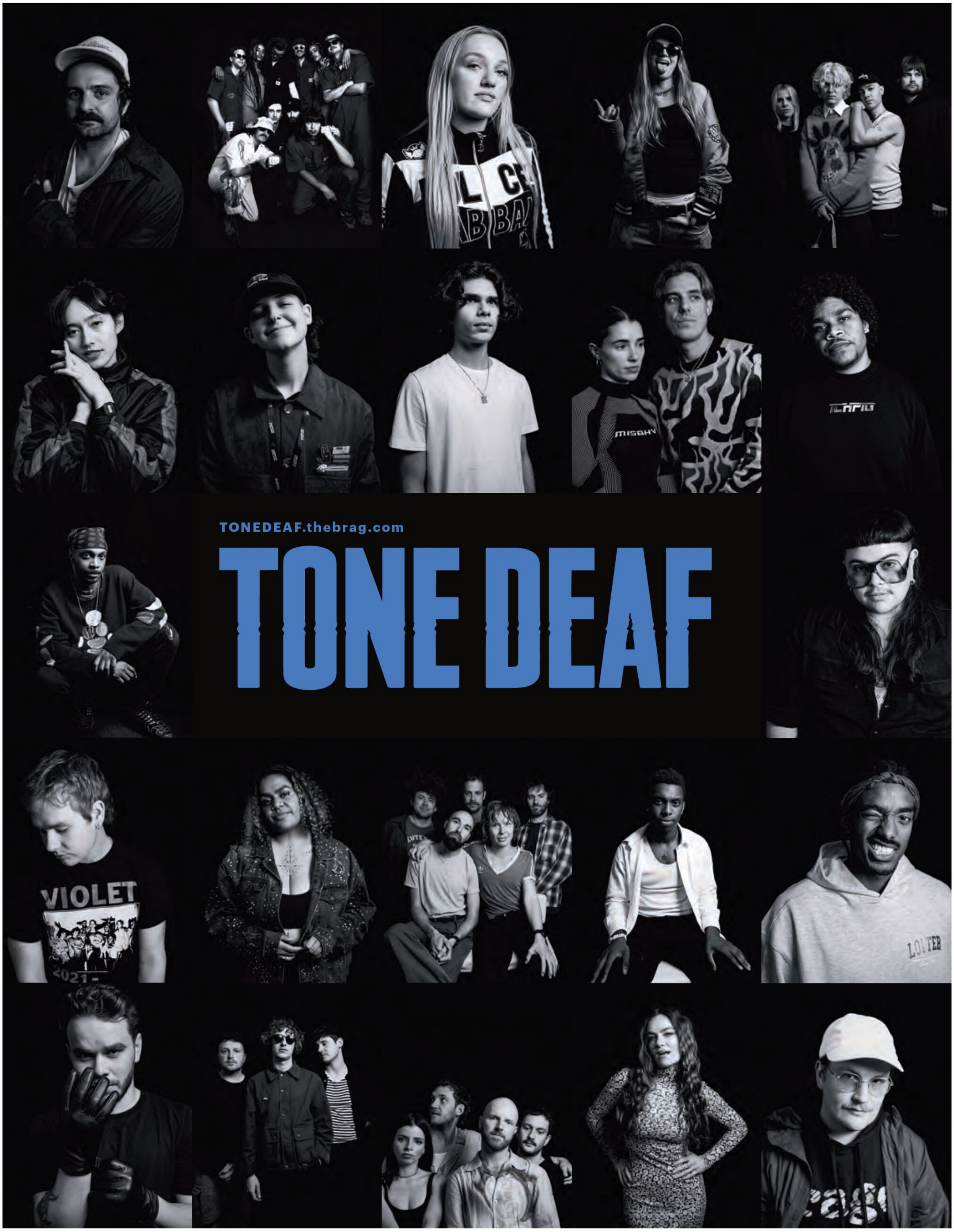
LIVE NATION



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Michelle Grace Hunder**

ADVERTORIAL

THE A-Z OF GETTING TESTED

Updating the rule book on sexual health

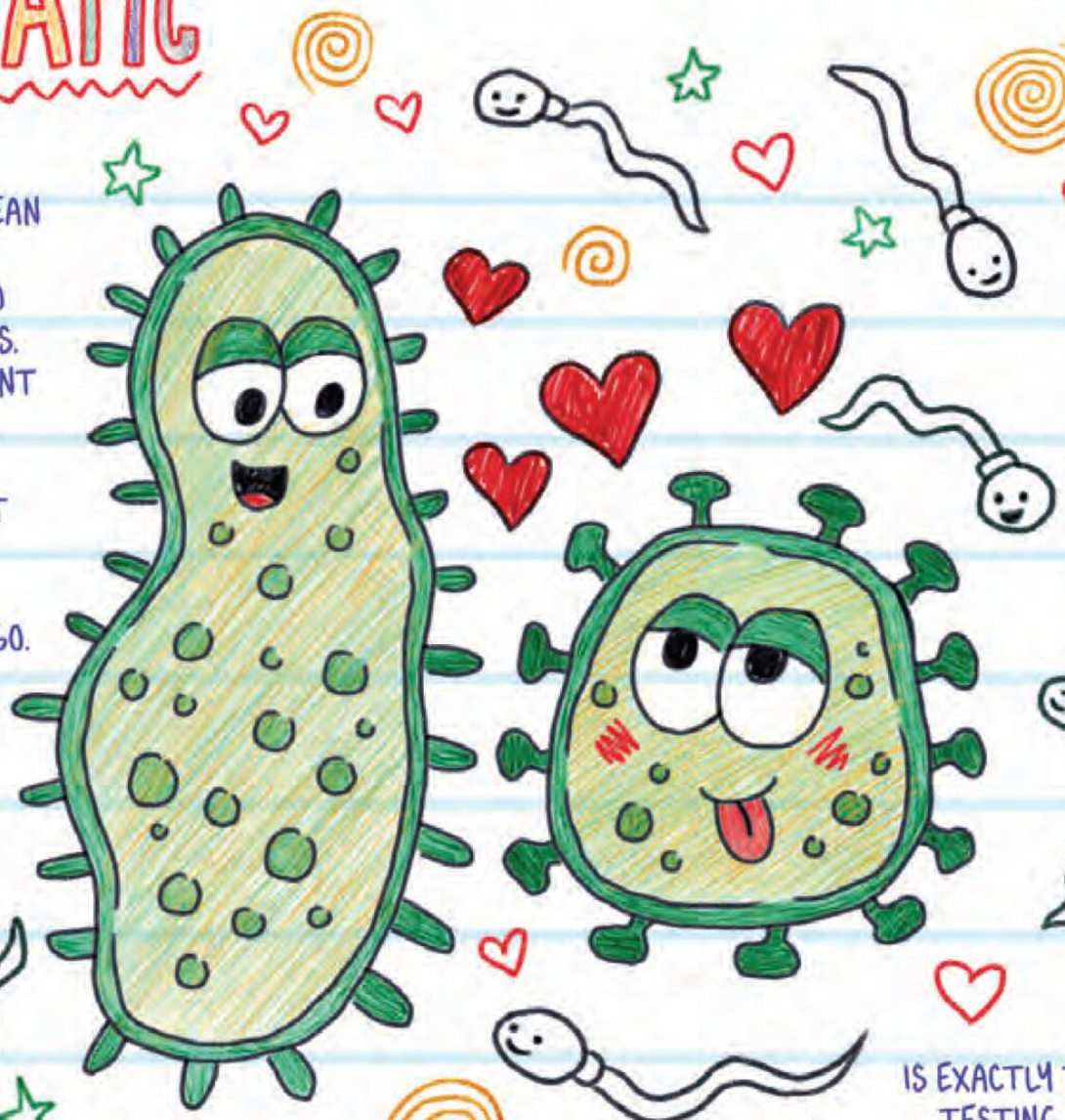
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CASS STEVENS

UPDATING THE RULE BOOK ON SEXUAL HEALTH

ASYMPTOMATIC

EXACTLY WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE: NO SYMPTOMS. HOWEVER, THIS DOESN'T MEAN A BILL OF CLEAN HEALTH. EVEN WITHOUT SYMPTOMS STIS CAN BE TRANSMITTED TO OTHERS AND CAUSE SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES. ASYMPTOMATIC STIS CAN CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE TO YOUR REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM, WHICH CAN LEAD TO INFERTILITY AND CHRONIC PAIN. CHLAMYDIA ALONE DOES NOT CAUSE VISIBLE SYMPTOMS IN 85 – 90 PERCENT OF CASES. REGULAR TESTING IS THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW YOU'RE GOOD TO GO.



DON'T

DON'T WANT TO TELL YOUR PARTNER YOU HAVE AN STI? YOU REALLY SHOULD AS THEY NEED TO LOOK AFTER THEIR HEALTH TOO. YOU CAN TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT HOW TO DO IT, OR WEBSITES LIKE LETTHEMKNOW.ORG.AU CAN GIVE YOU TIPS, AND CAN EVEN SEND MESSAGES ANONYMOUSLY. THERE IS NO EXCUSE NOT TO LET YOUR PARTNER(S) KNOW!

BEFOREPLAY

MAKE STI TESTING YOUR BEFOREPLAY, USE PROTECTION AND BOOK A CHECK-UP AT HEALTH.GOV.AU/STI

EASY

IS EXACTLY THE WORD TO USE TO DESCRIBE STI TESTING. IN AUSTRALIA, IT REALLY IS A VERY SIMPLE AND ACCESSIBLE PROCESS THAT COMES AT VERY LITTLE COST WHEN YOU WEIGH THE BENEFITS (MOST OF US CAN DO IT ON OUR LUNCH BREAK AND OFTEN, IT'S FREE WITH A MEDICARE CARD THROUGH ANY GP WHO BULK BILLS).

CHECKING

ON THE REG. WHETHER YOU'RE SINGLE-ING AND MINGLING OR IN A RELATIONSHIP, REGULAR STI TESTS ARE CRUCIAL. TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT HOW OFTEN YOU SHOULD TEST BASED ON YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

FFS

GET TESTED, AND AVOID HAVING TO SAY THIS TO YOURSELF.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CASS STEVENS

GONORRHOEA

IN 2022 THERE WERE 32,877 GONORRHOEA CASES IDENTIFIED IN AUSTRALIA. IT'S COMMON ENOUGH THAT YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL LIKE A SILLY-BILLY IF YOU TEST POSITIVE, BUT BAD ENOUGH IN THE WORST OF CASES THAT YOU SHOULD DEFINITELY AVOID IT AND TEST REGULARLY. IT CAN INFECT MANY AREAS OF THE BODY AND SYMPTOMS AREN'T ALWAYS OBVIOUS. BUT IN MOST CASES, IT CAN BE TREATED.

HIV

DESPITE DECADES OF PUBLIC MESSAGING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF USING PROTECTION, AND LEAPS AND BOUNDS IN THE MEDICAL FIELD FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH, OR AT RISK OF, HIV, HIV IS STILL HERE. YOU DON'T NEED US TO TELL YOU PREVENTION IS THE ONLY WAY TO AVOID IT. REGULAR TESTING HELPS REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMITTING HIV ONWARDS. PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP) CAN REDUCE YOUR CHANCE OF ACQUIRING HIV, PARTICULARLY WHEN COMBINED WITH REGULAR TESTING. TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES SO THEY CAN RECOMMEND THE BEST PREP REGIMEN FOR YOU.

I

AM A MEAN, CLEAN, HEALTHY STI-FREE MACHINE (IS WHAT YOU'LL SAY, MID AIR-PUNCH, WHEN YOU'RE HUNKY-DORY).

JUST

USE PROTECTION. THERE'S A REASON THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY BANG THIS DRUM UNTIL IT'S BUSTED – PREVENTION IS ALWAYS BETTER AND PROTECTION IS EASY AND CHEAP – INDIVIDUAL CONDOMS IN A PACK COST LESS THAN A LATTE (YEAH, WE ALL HATE BUYING CONDOMS, BUT TO COIN A PHRASE: JUST DO IT).

K-L-A-MYDIA

JOKES – IT'S CHLAMYDIA, THE MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED STI IN AUSTRALIA. DON'T LET COACH CARR FROM MEAN GIRLS GET IN THE WAY OF KNOWING THAT HOWEVER YOU SPELL IT, IT AIN'T A GOAL. REGULAR TESTING MEANS YOU CAN GET ON TOP OF IT WITHOUT WAITING FOR SYMPTOMS (WHICH ARE OFTEN HIDDEN UNTIL THEY'VE CAUSED THEIR DAMAGE TO YOUR REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM – AGAIN, NOT A GOAL).

LEARNING

IS LIBERATING. DON'T BE EMBARRASSED OR FEEL ASHAMED FOR TESTING POSITIVE FOR ANY STI. THE KEY TO TREATING STIS AND REDUCING TRANSMISSION IS EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT. WHILE MANY TREATMENTS AVAILABLE ARE EASY AND AFFORDABLE, THEY SHOULDN'T BE TREATED AS A GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARD. EVERYBODY IS DIFFERENT, MEANING EFFICACY CAN VARY (NOT TO MENTION SYMPTOMS CAN DO MORE THAN JUST RUIN YOUR DAY).

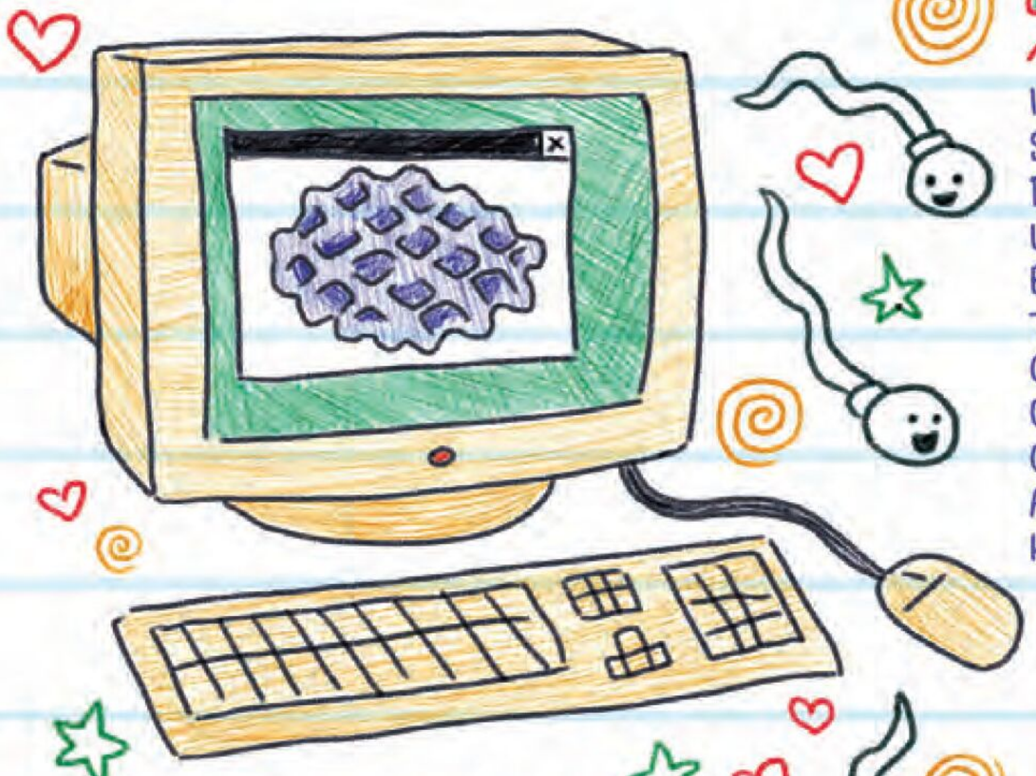
Words By **Joe Cutcliffe** | Illustrations By **Cat Stevens**

MAKING LOVE

DOING THE HORIZONTAL FOLK DANCE, SCREWING, BOINKING — WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH PAGES FOR ALL THE EUPHEMISMS. BUT WHATEVER YOU CALL IT, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FUN. KEEP IT THAT WAY BY TESTING BEFOREHAND, YEAH?

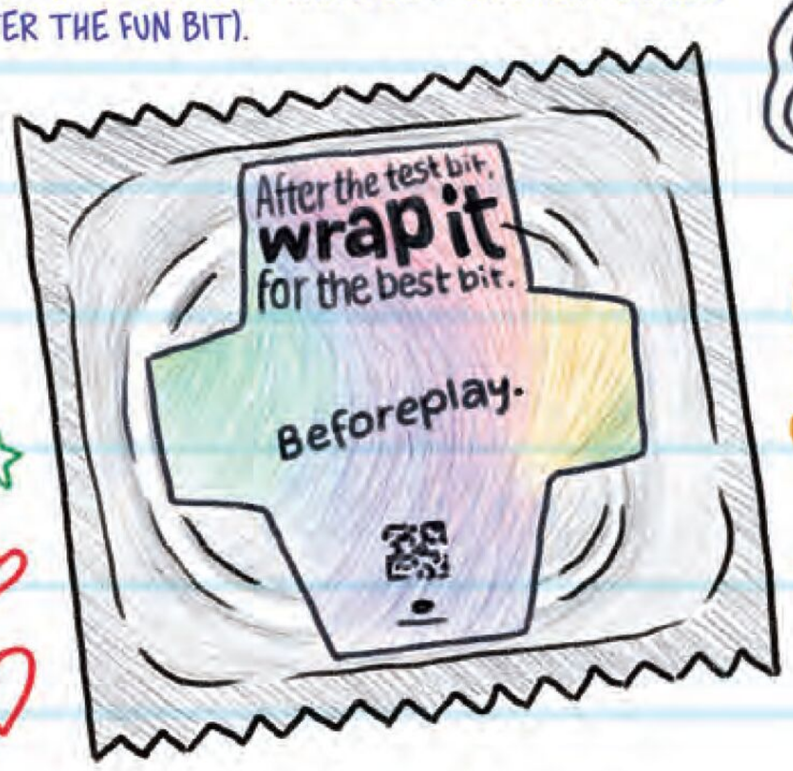
ONLINE

IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND A TONNE OF GREAT INFORMATION THAT WILL STIMULATE THE MIND. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO SEXUAL HEALTH, ASK A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL WITH A DEGREE INSTEAD OF DR GOOGLE. IF YOU DO WANT TO USE THE WEB, CHECK OUT HEALTH.GOV.AU/STI FOR MORE INFORMATION ON STIS AND HOW TO CONNECT WITH SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES IN YOUR AREA.



RUBBER UP

CONDOMS AREN'T YOUR PARTNER'S RESPONSIBILITY. STIS DON'T CARE IF YOU MET THAT NIGHT OR IT'S A FOREVER SITCH — HAVE THEM ON HAND AND USE THEM — IF FOR NOTHING MORE THAN A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP (AFTER THE FUN BIT).



NOT SURE WHERE TO GET TESTED?

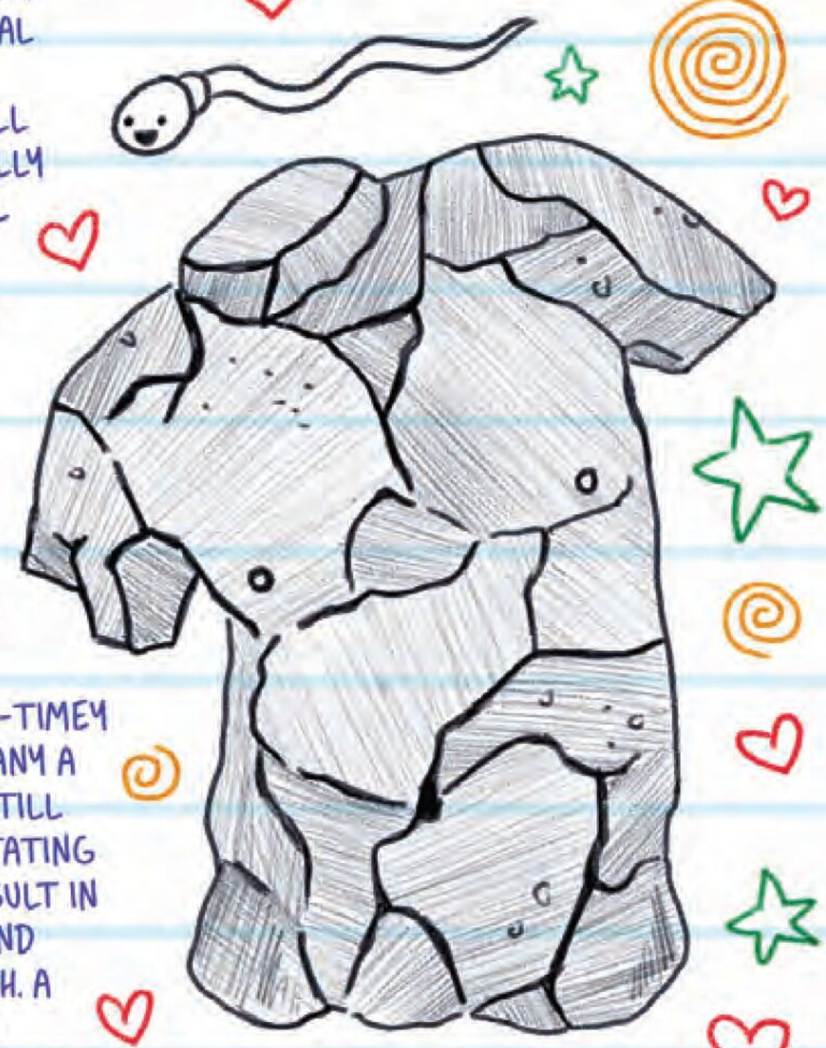
THAT'S FAIR, MOST DOCTOR'S SURGERIES DON'T HAVE NEON SIGNS — BUT THAT'S WHERE TO START. YOU CAN GET TESTED BY YOUR REGULAR DOCTOR, BUT THAT'S NOT YOUR ONLY OPTION — ANY DOCTOR OR GP CAN DO IT, AND TESTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE AT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES, ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED HEALTH ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES AND MEDICARE URGENT CARE CLINICS. FOR MORE INFO, HIT UP HEALTH.GOV.AU/STI.

PROTECTION

IS VITAL. ONE LITTLE BIT OF LATEX CAN SAVE YOU AND YOUR PARTNER(S) A GREAT DEAL OF WORRY AND REGRET. IT COSTS LITTLE, TAKES SECONDS, AND IS SO, SO EASY TO USE. USE A NEW CONDOM EVERY TIME YOU SWITCH BETWEEN ORAL, ANAL OR VAGINAL SEX, AND REMEMBER: CONDOMS DON'T PREVENT ALL STIS ALL OF THE TIME — ANYONE WHO IS SEXUALLY ACTIVE SHOULD HAVE REGULAR SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK-UPS.

QUESTIONS

STIS THROW UP MANY. BUT YOU'RE IN LUCK — IT'S 2024 AND ANSWERS YOU CAN TRUST ARE APLENTY. GET THEM FROM A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL.



SYPHILIS

CAN EASILY BE CHALKED UP AS AN OLD-TIMEY DISEASE THAT SAW THE DEMISE OF MANY A KING, PAINTER, AND WRITER, BUT IT STILL EXISTS TODAY, AND IT CAN BE DEVASTATING IF LEFT UNTREATED. SYPHILIS CAN RESULT IN BRAIN INFECTIONS, DEMENTIA, LUNG AND HEART FAILURE, BLINDNESS AND DEATH. A PREGNANT PERSON WITH UNTREATED SYPHILIS CAN PASS IT ONTO THEIR UNBORN BABY (CONGENITAL SYPHILIS). THIS CAN CAUSE MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTHS OR THE BABY TO DIE SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH, OR SUFFER PERMANENT ORGAN AND BRAIN DAMAGE. UNLIKE OSCAR WILDE, YOU CAN GET A TEST AND CURABLE TREATMENT LONG BEFORE YOU'RE FOREVER LOOKING UP AT THE STARS.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CASS STEVENS

TREATMENTS

BEFORE THE BEST PART WE NEED THE TEST PART, AND WE ARE LUCKY TO LIVE IN A TIME WHERE TREATMENTS FOR STIS EXIST. THERE ARE MUCH SEXIER MODERN MIRACLES WE LAUD AS GAME-CHANGING (ANYBODY WITH AN AIR FRYER KNOWS) – BUT WHILE THEY MIGHT BE BORING DINNER PARTY FODDER, THERE'S NO SHAME IN SEEKING HELP FROM A DOCTOR IF YOU THINK YOU NEED MEDICATION TO MANAGE AN STI. SERIOUS HEALTH IMPACTS AS A RESULT OF INFECTIONS ARE FOR THE MOST PART AVOIDABLE, IF TESTING AND TREATMENT ARE CARRIED OUT IN A TIMELY MANNER. PREVENTION IS STILL A BETTER LOVE STORY THAN ANTIBIOTICS (AND AGAIN, SYMPTOMS ARE A BIG VIBE KILLER).

URINE SAMPLES

ARE NON-INVASIVE AND TAKE A COUPLE OF MINUTES, IN PRIVATE. THEY ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF TESTING, AND EVERYBODY KNOWS HOW TO TINKLE. DON'T BE SCARED OF THE LITTLE PLASTIC JAR – IT'S A PIECE OF PISS.

VAGINAL SWAB

(AND ANAL SWABS) AREN'T USED TO TEST EVERY STI, AND THERE ARE ONLY A FEW INSTANCES A DOCTOR WILL ASK. YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL WILL DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF SAMPLE THEY NEED. MOST OF THE TIME, YOU CAN DO THEM YOURSELF, AND THEY ARE SAFE AND EASY.

WORSE

HOW SYMPTOMS GET WHEN LEFT UNTREATED. YOU CAN'T CRANBERRY-JUICE YOURSELF OUT OF PAINFUL SITUATIONS WHEN YOU'RE COPPING AN STI, BUT YOU CAN GET RID OF THEM PRETTY FAST BY GETTING DIAGNOSED AND TREATED WHEN THEY FIRST APPEAR.

X

IS THE CHROMOSOME WE ALL HAVE, WHATEVER GENDER YOU IDENTIFY AS. THAT'S HOW STIS WORK TOO. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU ARE, YOUR RELATIONSHIP STATUS, OR HOW YOU HAVE SEX – STIS DON'T DISCRIMINATE AND IT'S IMPORTANT WE ALL GET TESTED FOR THIS VERY REASON.

YOU

COULD IMPACT YOUR OWN (OR A SEXUAL PARTNER'S) FERTILITY. SOME STIS, WHEN LEFT UNTREATED, CAN CAUSE INFLAMMATION AND INFECTION OF THE TESTICLES AND PROSTATE, WHICH CAN REDUCE SPERM COUNT. THEY CAN ALSO CAUSE PELVIC INFLAMMATORY DISEASE WHICH CAN AFFECT THE UTERUS, OVARIES AND FALLOPIAN TUBES. INFERTILITY CAN RESULT IF THE INFECTION IS NOT TREATED PROPERLY.

ZZZ

YOU'LL BE PUNCHING MORE OF THESE WITH EASE GOING TO BED KNOWING YOU'RE SAFE (ALONE, OR WITH COMPANY).

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT – NOW YOU KNOW YOUR ABCS (OF SEXUAL HEALTH). REMEMBER TO MAKE STI TESTING YOUR BEFOREPLAY AND KEEP IT CLEAN WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN.

USE PROTECTION AND BOOK A CHECK-UP TODAY

VISIT HEALTH.GOV.AU/STI FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Words By **Joe Cutcliffe** | Illustrations By **Cat Stevens**

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The Mix

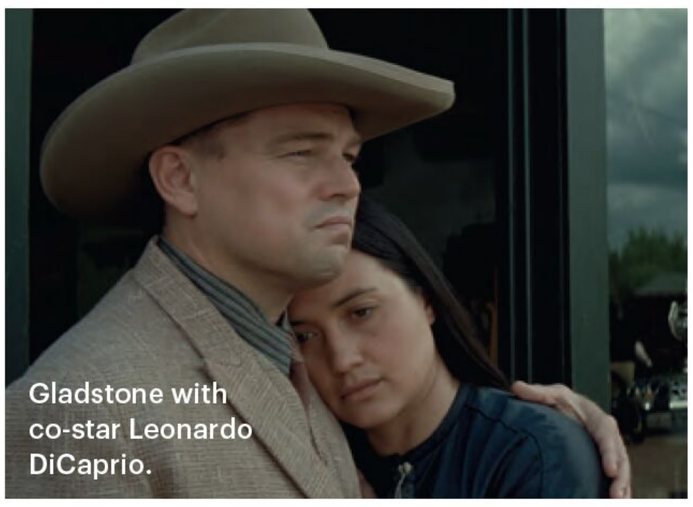
WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Lily Gladstone is Seizing the Moment

The actress landed an Oscars first, and she's been ready her whole life

→

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Carlos Jaramillo**



Gladstone with co-star Leonardo DiCaprio.

Lily Gladstone as Mollie Burkhart. **Below:** With *Killers of the Flower Moon* director Martin Scorsese.

→ LILY GLADSTONE

WHEN LILY Gladstone was growing up on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in rural Montana, acting in plays was an escape. The idea came from her father, a Native man of Piegan Blackfeet and Nez Perce heritage, whom she describes as "a bit of a wizard."

"My dad saw early on when I was onstage that I just thrived," Gladstone says. "When I was nine, it was the worst of it. I was struggling to keep friendships, bullied a lot. And he very matter-of-factly said, 'Oh, it's OK, honey. They're all going to be your friend someday when you win your Oscar.'"

She smiles. "Like I said, my dad's a little bit of a wizard. And when you're a kid and your dad, who can move clouds, tells you something like that, you think it's true."

FAST FACTS

ACTIVIST
Gladstone shines a light on domestic violence with the US National Indigenous Women's Resource Center.

AWARDS DARLING
She won a 2024 Golden Globe Award for *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

Now, all these years later, Gladstone may become the first Native American winner for acting in Oscar history. The nomination follows her quietly powerful turn as Mollie Burkhart, an Osage woman preyed upon by her husband, Ernest (Leonardo DiCaprio), and his rapacious uncle William Hale (Robert De Niro) in Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Adapted from David Grann's bestselling nonfiction book, it's a harrowing portrait of the Reign of Terror, a period in the 1920s when Osage were systematically murdered by white settlers for the rights to their oil-rich land. Gladstone's Mollie is the film's beating heart, reflecting her people's pain through her eyes.

It's that ability to evoke empathy that first caught Scorsese's attention in Kelly Reichardt's 2016 film *Certain Women*, in which Gladstone played a lonely rancher.

"There are so few actors who trust in stillness, quiet – and that trust comes from an extremely sharp understanding of their own presence," Scorsese says of Gladstone. "Actors used to call it their 'instrument' – maybe some still do. Lily is in complete command of her instrument. It's rare."

"There are so few actors who trust in stillness, quiet," says Martin Scorsese. "Lily is in complete command of her instrument. It's rare."

Cut to 2019 and Gladstone, in her mid-thirties with a few indies and small TV roles under her belt, was about to call it quits. As she sat in front of the computer ready to sign up for a data-analytics course, she received a notification for a meeting with Scorsese, who was beginning to cast *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

"I first met her on Zoom, with Leo DiCaprio," Scorsese recalls. "I had pretty much made up my mind at that point, but we did an audition and that was it."

When Gladstone found out she got the part, she lost it.

"I screamed and threw my phone across my parents' living room," she says. "And it was on Mollie Burkhart's birthday. The thought that it was Mollie's birthday meant that this was bigger than me."

The next thing Gladstone did was get back in front of that same computer to go online and start researching the Osage language. She took classes for seven weeks, studying with consultants Christopher Cote and Janis Carpenter. She gained such facility with the language and culture that Scorsese entrusted her with rewriting several scenes involving her character, including one in which she labels Ernest a "coyote," which came from an Osage story about "tricksters" that she'd heard from Cote.

Since the film's release, life has changed quickly. Recently, Gladstone was seated next to David Fincher at a film screening and the two struck up a conversation, with the *Zodiac* director offering her advice for navigating the award season.

"He compared it to his friend teaching his teenage daughter to drive on the freeway: 'Don't let how fast other people want to drive bully you into going faster than you're ready to,'" she remembers, before grinning to herself: "Things move at their own pace."

MARLOW STERN

APPLE TV+

Gaga and Phoenix in *Joker: Folie à Deux.*

2024

Most Anticipated Movies

From 'Furiosa' to 'Wicked' – what you need to see this year

BY DAVID FEAR *and* JAMES JENNINGS

Furiosa May 23rd
She helped Mad Max survive *Fury Road* – now find out how Imperator Furiosa became the badass rebel of George Miller's post-apocalyptic franchise. Anya Taylor-Joy steps into the battered boots once filled by Charlize Theron.

Birdeater July 18th
Winner of the Audience Award for Best Narrative Feature at last year's Sydney Film Festival, this Aussie psychological thriller is about a bride-to-be (Shabana Azeez) who attends her fiancé's (Mackenzie Fearnley) buck's party with disastrous results.

Beetlejuice Beetlejuice Sept 5th
Michael Keaton and director Tim Burton reunite for this sequel to the duo's 1988 classic, in which the ghost with the most now haunts Jenna "Wednesday" Ortega. Say his name three times!

Joker: Folie à Deux October 3rd
Joaquin Phoenix returns for another round as the Man Who Laughs – but what has us jazzed is Lady Gaga (!) playing the Joker's sweetheart and literal partner in crime, the delightfully demented Harley Quinn (!!!).

The Bikeriders July 4th
After playing a bald baddie in *Dune: Part Two*, we get a second serving this year of Austin Butler – and his magnificent hair – in *The Bikeriders*, which charts the rise of a Sixties Chicago motorcycle club from outsider gang to criminal enterprise. With Jodie Comer, Michael Shannon and Tom Hardy also on board, expect fireworks.

The Surfer TBC
Nicolas Cage as an Aussie surfer who returns to his small hometown after years living in the US, only to come up against a gang of territorial, tough-guy surfers who think they own the beach? Sign us up immediately. If there's a scene where Cage smacks an adversary with a board and says "Surf's up, bitch", this could be an all-timer.

Audrey TBC
Kiwi comedy powerhouse Jackie van Beek (*The Breaker Upperers*) stars in this dramedy about a self-appointed 'Mother of the Year' – living vicariously through her daughters – who decides to assume the identity of one when an accident lands them in a coma.

The Moogai TBC
Based on a short film, this draws upon First Nations mythology to create a home-grown horror film about a married Aboriginal couple who believe they are being haunted by an evil spirit intent on taking their babies. Expect an uptick in baby monitor sales post-release.

Wicked: Part 1 November 28th
Broadway's *Wizard of Oz*-revising musical comes to the big screen, with Cynthia Erivo as the Wicked Witch of the West and Ariana Grande as Glinda the Good. Jeff Goldblum, Bowen Yang, and Michelle Yeoh follow them down the yellow brick road.

Mufasa: The Lion King December 19th
Barry Jenkins calls the shots on this prequel to 2019's *The Lion King* remake, which focuses on how Simba's dad became king of the jungle. The *Moonlight* filmmaker has promised laughs, tears, and some wonderful music numbers. Hakuna matata indeed.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: NIKO TAVERNISE/WARNER BROS.; UMBRELLA ENTERTAINMENT; RADEK LADCZUK; SUPPLIED

DANCE ALL NIGHT
"I have the tools to make whatever I want," says one developer.

Fortnite's Brave New World

Facebook couldn't sell an all-encompassing metaverse. Now, gamers are building their own

BY MILES KLEE

IT'S NIGHTTIME, and you're in a forest of tall trees and glowing mushrooms. There are others with you in this particular clearing, which appears to be lit up by fireflies. Before you can get your bearings, the sparks in the air begin to fade, and a giant screen comes into focus overhead. On it is the Australian singer and producer Tones and I kicking off the title track of her album *Welcome to the Madhouse*. "Welcome to a place you've never been/A place you've always dreamed of/But here nothing's as it seems," the song continues as you and your companions fly to a trippy, haunted-looking mansion with rave lights and impossible staircases like something out of M.C. Escher. The party is on.

Oh, and by the way, you're in *Fortnite*.

The franchise, released by Epic Games in 2017, is known for its Battle Royale platform, which pits 100 competitors against one another in a shoot'em-up melee on a vibrant island teeming with fanciful weapons, vehicles, and gadgets. At the height of the pandemic, the entire planet seemed to be playing. Yet the company now seeks to establish a thriving metaverse like you've never seen before – and is banking on the gamers who made *Fortnite* a massive hit around the world to make that happen.

Since 2018, Epic has offered *Fortnite* Creative, a sandbox-style mode that allows users to build their own playable maps. But it wasn't until last March that it took major steps toward supercharging this user-generated content, or UGC, announcing a new revenue-sharing model, pledging forty percent of the game's net revenue – estimated to be in the billions annually – to people publishing their own games on the platform. (As of October 2023, it's paid out over $180 million to these creators.) The company simultaneously unveiled Unreal Editor for *Fortnite* (UEFN), an application comprising a set of tools from Unreal Engine, the 3D-graphics framework used to develop *Fortnite* and previous hit games (and by Hollywood studios to create shows like *The Mandalorian*).

Thanks to these tools, it's not just mini games these new developers are creating – it's an entire interactive network. That's why, even after the notorious collapse of Mark Zuckerberg's proposed metaverse, Epic and its growing army of designers see themselves as collaborating on a distinct and promising successor, one that sprawls out organically. This time, it's the citizens within a digital nation who get to run the show.

"Facebook has a ton of users, but they're not gamers," says Chad Mustard, a forty-year-old father of four who made the leap from *Fortnite* Creative to UEFN, and uploads much of his content to a YouTube channel, Mustard Plays, where he has more than 800,000 followers. Mustard got into the scene through family ties – his brother, Donald Mustard, was *Fortnite*'s chief creative officer at Epic until his retirement last September – but is thrilled about the notion of a snowballing, all-connected virtual world. "The only way a metaverse could ever exist is with user-generated content," he contends. "Epic has taken their player base and said, 'OK, we're gonna unleash your creativity.' "

COURTESY OF ALLIANCE STUDIOS LLC

Mackenzie Jackson, 31, never imagined herself as a developer. "I was just a gamer," she says. She and her brothers were always on the lookout for free titles, which drew them to *Fortnite*. But it was *Fortnite* Creative that really caught her attention. "That, for me, was eye-opening," Jackson says. "I have the tools to make whatever I want."

At first, Jackson saw it as a hobby, but in 2019, Epic asked if she wanted to help craft one of the *Fortnite* Welcome Hubs, portals where creators would be able to access their own games and those built by others. Jackson flew to Epic's headquarters in Cary, North Carolina, where she met another creator, Simon Bell; that same year, the pair collaborated with esports brand 100 Thieves and sponsors including Uber Eats and Rocket Mortgage to launch the "first-ever commercial experience" in *Fortnite*.

That's when they saw the potential for a full-time business, founding Alliance Studios, one of the premier consultancy groups for clients looking to break into the *Fortnite* ecosystem – all the while building experiences like the Tones and I concert.

The 2023 UEFN upgrade, according to Saxs Persson, executive vice president at Epic, came out of the "critical mass" of user ingenuity and advanced tech. He tells *Rolling Stone* that the company was pleasantly surprised by how it took off; 300 to 400 new "Islands" – Epic's term for individual games – are published every day.

User-generated content has taken off: 300 to 400 "Islands" – Epic's term for individual games – are published every day.

Jeremy Pedron, known online as "Squatingdog," is among the prolific developers behind that boom. Having amassed a following by putting out a *Fortnite* companion app, he has a built-in audience for his maps, including "Fortnopoly", a barebones colosseum environment that he fleshed out with *Monopoly*-style twists, and "Nope", a deathrun game where players speed through a bedeviling array of killer traps.

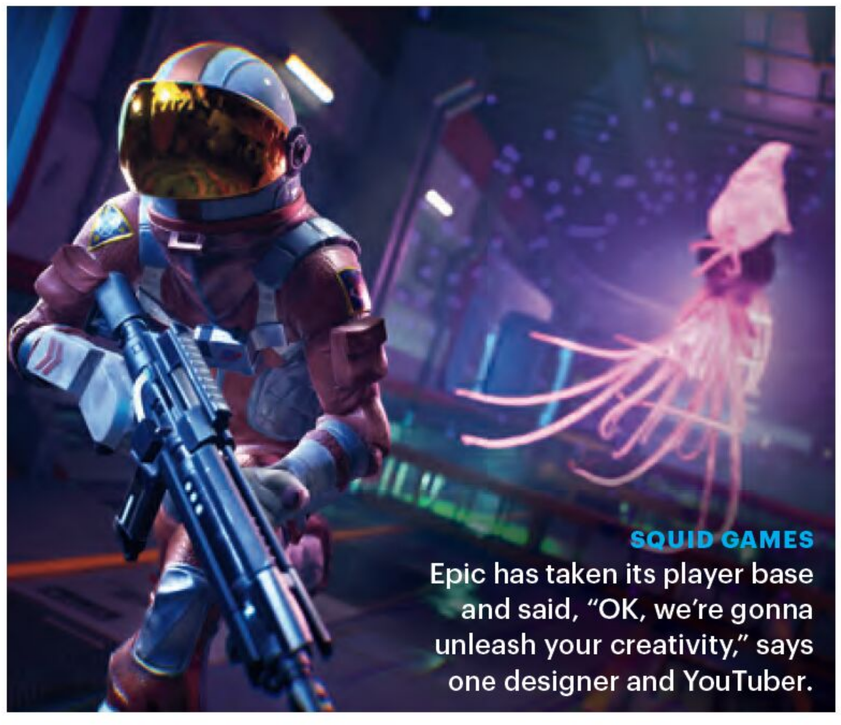
One of Pedron's most viral 2023 creations was a "Barbenheimer" map inspired by the concurrent summer theatrical run of the movies *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*. It was an exercise in trying to bring outsiders with a view of *Fortnite* as nothing more than continuous combat into a future of limitless alternatives. "So when you're asking the question, 'I don't want to play Battle Royale anymore' – well, there'll be *Fortnite* racing. There'll be *Lego Fortnite*, there'll be *Fortnite* music."

"The metaverse is always going to be in gaming," says Josh Benzing, CEO of 404 Creative, another bootstrapped company of *Fortnite* creators without much background in game design. "That's where you need to be."

Benzing notes that with UEFN, his budding industry has gotten more competitive, with big-name influencers hiring devs to make them maps. "All of a sudden, they're performing better than even studios like ours," he says. (Persson says Epic, which pays creators according to how well their games attract and retain players, doesn't view this arrangement as a "zero-sum game," because everyone is "pulling in the same direction.")

Despite any growing pains, Benzing sounds bullish, in part because celebrities flocking to the platform may indicate that it's viable in the long term. "A lot of artists are creating their own independent experience," he says. Snoop Dogg and his son Cordell Broadus, Benzing notes, recently launched Death Row Games to help diverse creators publish their work in *Fortnite*, opening yet another talent pool.

"It's truly a new pioneership of what the players want," Pedron says. "But also, what can we create that players don't know they want yet?" ®



SQUID GAMES
Epic has taken its player base and said, "OK, we're gonna unleash your creativity," says one designer and YouTuber.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF 404 CREATIVE; ROBYN VON SWANK

D&D'S STREAMING COMEBACK

Thanks to streaming platforms — and a huge contingent of viewers who yearn for the days of pen-and-paper gaming — tabletop games like *Dungeons & Dragons* are more popular than ever. Without the aid of flashy visuals, "Actual Plays" — live shows featuring full casts improvising with the roll of the dice to craft expansive stories in real time — span genre mainstays, official extensions, and even homebrew titles. It's one of the most unexpectedly engrossing ways to lose yourself online. Here, some of the top crews to watch.

Critical Role

The reigning kings of Actual Play, *Critical Role* (above) began as a group of friends and veteran voice actors, including Matthew Mercer, Ashley Johnson, and Laura Bailey, just picking up their weekend ritual for a live audience on Twitch. Now, they're a multimedia empire with thousands of hours across three campaigns, an animated adaptation on Prime Video, and even their own tabletop games, including horror RPG Candela Obscura, hitting shelves. A well-oiled machine, *Critical Role* makes for the perfect entryway for newcomers.

Dimension 2.0

Dimension 2.0 has a sprawling cast of diverse players and guest stars from across the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities. With a slew of recorded and live series led by a group of improv comics including Brennan Lee Mulligan and Rashawn Nadine Scott, their shows are equal parts raucous and emotionally affecting. Airing on Dropout (formerly College Humor), many of their stories focus on coming-of-age tales and intense character growth. They also do incredible, copyright-safe adaptations of well-worn stories like *The Lord of the Rings*.

World of Darkness

This crew's first campaign, *L.A. by Night* — one of the first Actual Plays to deviate from D&D — helped establish a darker vein of tabletop play, set in the World of Darkness universe using the ruleset of 2015's *Vampire: The Masquerade 5th Edition*. Hosted by game designer Jason Carl — the ringleader of the entire franchise — it ties together the ever-expanding world that now includes successors *N.Y. by Night* and *Seattle by Night*. Whereas other Actual Play groups build their own personal narratives using games, these series are produced in coordination with the game's publisher, making the improvised live-play journeys canonical to the overarching story — from novels to video games.

CHRISTOPHER CRUZ

ALL CHARGED UP
Purnell as Lucy, who leaves her cushy world to help rebuild America.

Fallout's New Chapter is Dystopian Prestige TV

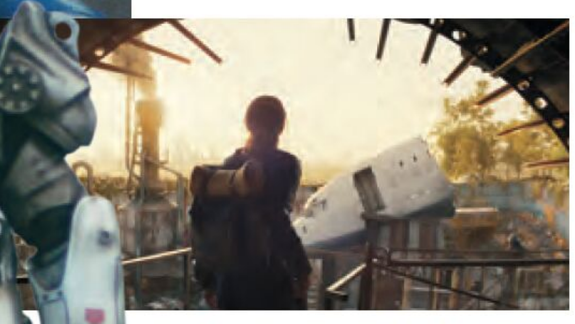
The popular video game is set to be the next big-ticket show – if it can overcome its open-world challenges

BY CHRISTOPHER CRUZ

"WAR. WAR NEVER changes." It's a grim warning, which leads the introductory monologue to every mainline game in the *Fallout* franchise. It's a real mood-setter, usually accompanied by a summary of the state of society: in an alternative future, the world is living in retro-futurist, atompunk bliss. That is, until the bombs drop. And so, two-hundred years after the end of everything, the story begins.

The first *Fallout* game launched for home computers in 1997, introducing players to a nuclear hellscape where they take on the role of a Vault Dweller – people who, fortunately or not, have survived generations underground. The game presents a world filled with irradiated monsters, mutated ghouls, and warring factions driven by political or religious zealotry. It's grown with the times – 2008's *Fallout 3* morphed the series from a point-and-click RPG to an open-world journey, and now, it's about to change again, with a Prime Video adaptation from the creators of HBO's *Westworld*, Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy.

Nolan, who co-wrote 2008's *The Dark Knight* with his brother Christopher Nolan, helped kick off the "latter-day comic book golden age on film," as he describes it. It was around then he first discovered the cinematic potential for video games, particularly *Fallout 3*. "I played more of that game than I care to admit," Nolan says. "If *The Dark Knight Rises* took an extra year, it may have had to do with *Fallout 3*."



Alongside showrunners Geneva Robertson-Dworet and Graham Wagner, Nolan sought to overcome major challenges, namely balancing the game's elegiac tone without losing its quirky spirit and, especially, consolidating a player's choice-driven experience into something linear.

"You have some storylines, but the world is the opposite of on-rails," he says. "And bringing that scope to the audience? [That kind of] freedom's impossible. There's nothing more on-rails than prestige television."

The solution is what Nolan calls the "classic HBO mould of an omnibus ensemble," following three characters. The story begins with a Vault Dweller named Lucy (Ella Purnell), who, forced to leave a cushy subterranean life, will cross paths with Maximus (Aaron Moten), whom Nolan describes as a squire in a "quasi-militaristic, quasi-religious organisation dedicated to limiting the spread of technology." Rounding out the trio is the Ghoul, a near-immortal, disfigured gunslinger, played by Walton Goggins. His journey will take viewers through multiple eras, from the pre-nuclear apocalypse to the series' present, charting his path from a normal life in 2077 to becoming an irradiated Man in Black two centuries later. The show will hinge on the juxtaposition of these characters' worldviews. "We have a knight in shining armour, a zombie cowboy, and a quirky suburbanite," says Wagner. "[They] don't have much of a shared sense of history, or even a shared sense of reality."

That lack of shared reality sadly parallels much of the cultural division in our own world, and will boil up through Lucy's experience. "[There's] so much resonance to this story of this privileged young lady who comes from a luxury fallout shelter and has spent her entire life – and the lives of the previous nine generations – with this almost messianic fervour about returning to the earth and rebuilding America," says Nolan. "And this total ignorance to all the people they left behind and left to rot up above. It's pretty great material for satire."

Fallout is streaming now on Amazon Prime Video.

A STREAMER'S GUIDE: 2024'S BEST GAMES

Singer and VTuber Ironmouse has gained nearly two million Twitch followers as a perky, anime-esque demon queen. Here, her most-anticipated games of the year.

FINAL FANTASY VII REBIRTH
This franchise, known for reimagining the fate of its most-popular characters, has fans ravenous for information: "I'm just really excited to see where they take the story."

LIKE A DRAGON: INFINITE WEALTH
A bizarre blend of RPG, mini games, and life simulation, Sega's cult series offers "a lot of drama, but the comedic moments really sell it."

TEKKEN 8
Following *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*, this is the latest legacy fighting game to get an update: "Seeing these classic franchises come back? I'm excited."

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: PRIME VIDEO; COURTESY OF AKAGI_A; PRIME VIDEO, 2; SQUARE ENIX; SEGA; BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT

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Em-Haley Walker in her TE KAAHU project guise.

MUSIC

Wonderful Waiata:

Eight Memorable te reo Māori Songs

A selection of top tracks sung in the Māori mother tongue

By **CONOR LOCHRIE**

"Rangirara"
TE KAAHU

When Em-Haley Walker wished to get more in touch with her Māori identity in her art, she briefly stepped away from her stylish alt-pop project Theia to become TE KAAHU at the turn of the decade. The rewards were immense: TE KAAHU's 2022 album, *Te Kaahu O Rangi*, was a beautiful collection of waiata that took listeners on a journey of respect and love for Walker's ancestors.

Walker later performed three album cuts live for *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*'s 'In My Room' sessions, including the swaying country gem "Rangirara", and her full session brought to the fore all the vulnerability and tenderness of her TE KAAHU project. Walker may now have returned to being Theia in music, but the spiritual impact of her TE KAAHU album will carry on, even if she decides to never release under the moniker again.

"Āio"
Lost Tribe Aotearoa (ft. Rei)

Featured in *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*'s 'Up-And-Coming Aotearoa Artists' series in 2023, Lost Tribe Aotearoa are a mighty eight-piece family band based out of Whaingaroa/Raglan. Their sound, which is blessed with good vibrations, blends infectious reggae rock with their native roots, and the best example of this came last year on "Āio", their first te reo Māori release.

A soulful reimagining of their previous single "Irie", which was a Top Ten hit on the New Zealand

FROM TOP: FRANCES CARTER; RADAR PHOTOGRAPHY NZ

Charts in 2018, "Āio" was a pivotal moment for the tight-knit ensemble as they infused their native language into their music with rewarding results. "This is our first waiata Māori, but is definitely not the last," they said last year. "We feel this song is really going to push us to write more songs in te reo and also help our own journeys into learning our language at a deeper level."

"Ko Tātou Te Ahi"
Dillastrate ft. Tiki Taane

Fierce drum and bass live from a marae? It must be Ōtautahi's electrifying duo Dillastrate. Recorded live inside the wharenui at Ngā Hau E Whā National Marae in Christchurch, "Ko Tātou Te Ahi" captured Henare 'H' Kaa and Tim Driver at their best, the waiata featuring rapping in both Māori and English atop powerful bass lines and propulsive drums. It also helped that the legend himself, Tiki Taane, joined on production, having previously collaborated with Dillastrate on another 2023 single, "Way to Flow".

Dillastrate's waiata was also infused with a moving sense of place; released as part of 2023's Waiata Anthems Week compilation, "Ko Tātou Te Ahi" celebrated Christchurch's people for their "resilience, mana and ability to overcome adversity and rise above it."

"Te Ao Mārama"
Lorde

Lorde was unfairly maligned for her thoughtful 2021 album, *Solar Power*, but it was the pop superstar's first album to get its own te reo Māori spin-off release. "In making an album about where I'm from, it was important to me to be able to say: this makes us who we are down here," Lorde said about the surprise digital EP *Te Ao Mārama* upon its release.

Five *Solar Power* songs were re-recorded for the project, which was released appropriately during Te Wiki o Te Reo, a week of celebration of the Māori language. The title track was a standout on the initial English language version and it was no different on "Te Ao Mārama", Lorde's well-meaning singing floating nicely over the now-iconic stripped back acoustic guitar line. (It should be noted that while Lorde does not speak te reo Māori, she worked closely with three translators to recreate each album track's lyrics.)

"Matemateāone"
Stan Walker

Hollywood has finally beckoned for Stan Walker. His single, "I AM", is an original song for Ava DuVernay's upcoming film, *Origin*, which came about after the Oscar-nominated filmmaker slid into Walker's DMs after hearing the Aotearoa artist's stunning vocals on his rendition of Kanye West's "Ultralight Beam".

While the sincere "I AM" represents reclamation of one's identity to Walker, he's been proudly celebrating his Māori identity throughout his career. His 2021 single, "Matemateāone" was a touching bilingual ballad that paid tribute to his own marriage to his partner, Lou Tyson. The waiata's release came just before Walker dropped *Te Arohanui*, his first album sung in te reo Māori.

"Kai Tangata"
Alien Weaponry

Waipu warriors Alien Weaponry have released some of the most visceral te reo Māori songs in recent years, chief among them 2018's heaving "Kai Tangata". Once named "the hottest young metal band in the world" by *Metal Hammer,* the trio of Henry Te Reiwhati de Jong, Lewis Raharuhi de Jong and Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds have been making waves in metal music since their mid-teens on a global scale.

Crowds from New Zealand to Slovenia, Germany to even the US couldn't get enough of their powerful sound, and in the past five years "Kai Tangata" has amassed over 16 million views on YouTube alone, with many millions more on streaming services. There's just something about metal and te reo Māori that works so well together.

"Pepeha"
Six60

In 2022, Six60 were drawn into a needless row with Australian Sky News host Rowan Dean over their use of te reo Māori on their tour posters. "There's not a word of English anywhere in there", the loudmouth host blasted, but he had picked the wrong band to take on. "Six60 is all about bringing people together, no matter the language," the Dunedin icons declared, humbling Dean by offering him free tickets to their tour so that he could "experience some positivity."

From haunting singles to rousing hakas at the State of Origin, Six60 always make sure to celebrate their band's Māori heritage wherever they go. Released one year before their row with Dean, "Pepeha" was Six60's second song to be recorded in te reo Māori, released to coincide with Te Wiki o te reo Māori. Band members Marlon Gerbes and Matiu Walters wrote it alongside several te reo Māori experts, with the use of traditional Māori instruments, taonga pūoro, throughout the song adding a beautiful touch. As with most Six60 releases, it captivated Aotearoa listeners, reaching Number Two on the New Zealand Chart and taking out the Rolling Stone Aotearoa Award for Best Single.

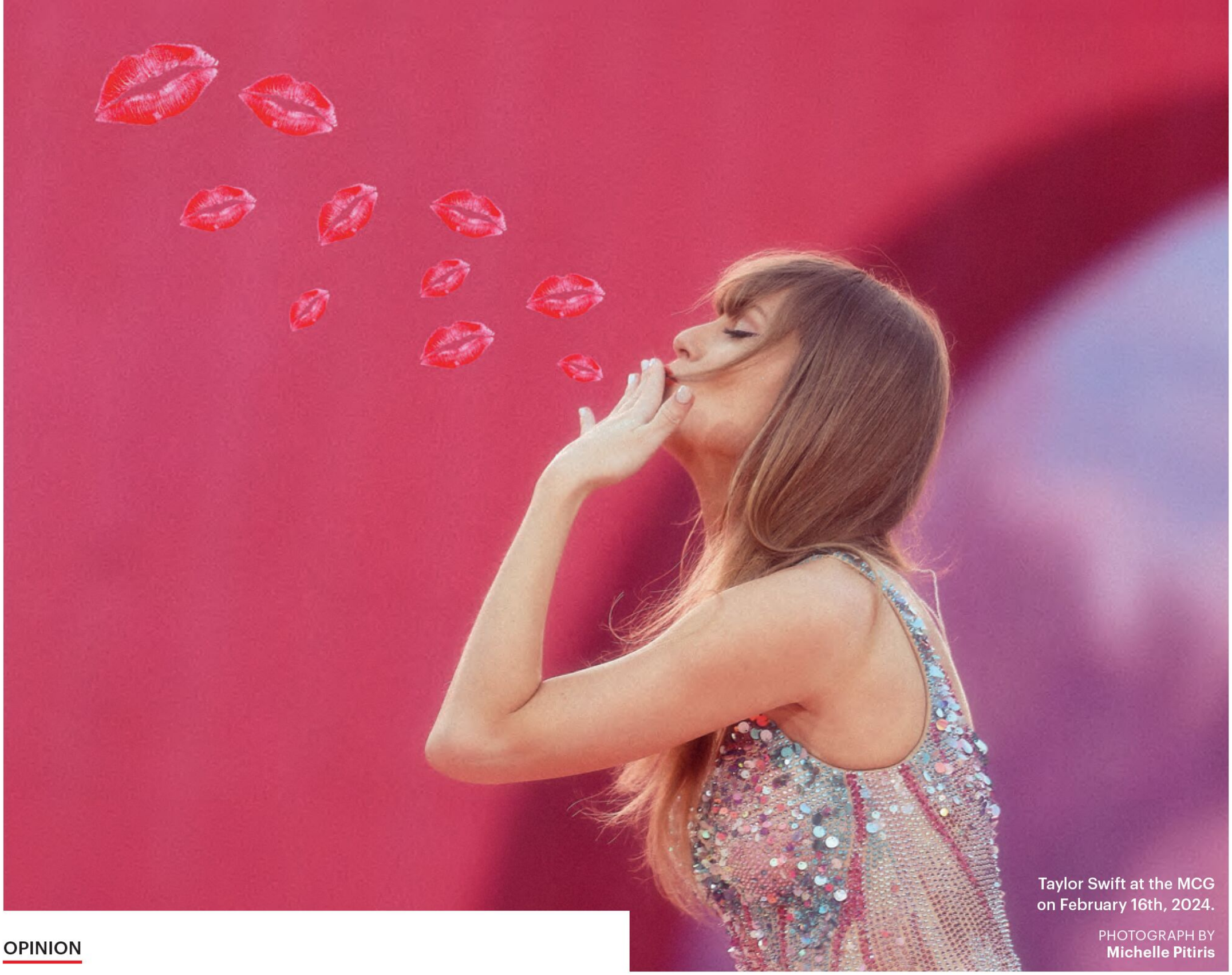
"Te Reo ki Whakarongotai"
AJA

AJA's sincere and moving 2023 waiata paid tribute to the Aotearoa singer-songwriter's ancestral home in Waikanae on the Kāpiti Coast. It was a truly whānau effort: AJA's Uncle Kahu Ropata penned the waiata, while her older sister, Trey Ropata, composed the initial tune before AJA, Kahu and Natasha Ropata developed it further.

AJA's waiata encouraged listeners to immerse themselves in the distinct language of Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai, the marae and iwi to which the artist belongs. "This song is a product of the vast wisdom inherited from generations before," as she explained at the time. Nominated for the APRA Maioha Silver Scroll Award for a previous waiata ("Te Iho"), meaningful songs like "Te Reo ki Whakarongotai" should ensure that AJA is a future nominee for years to come. ®

Singer-producer AJA's waiata speaks of knowledge passed down through wānanga.

FROM TOP: SUPPLIED; SUPPLIED; ISAAC TE REINA



Taylor Swift at the MCG on February 16th, 2024.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Michelle Pitiris**

OPINION

Why Do We Hate Young Female Fandom?

Tracking Our History of Girl-Shaming from Lisztomania to the Taylor Bump

By BIANCA O'NEILL

BETWEEN *Barbie*, Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, 2023 was truly the year of female fandom. So if young female fan bases are so lucrative, why do we culturally devalue them so much?

Why is being an excited, young female fan so shameful? It's a question many women have asked in their lifetime, particularly when it comes to their music tastes. Barely a week passes by in which we don't see a puff piece about screaming throngs of girls dying to spot the latest boy band in the wild, or swipe past an article detailing the great lengths a fan has gone to in order to emulate, or connect with, their chosen starlet. Often this content is created in the same tone that a parent employs when they explain how their toddler will only wear his Spider-Man costume to school – with a bemused sort of affection, paired with a heady dose of patronisation.

But when we think of 2023's *Barbie* movie, or Taylor Swift and Beyoncé's mega-grossing 2023 tours, or the widespread, international obsession with K-pop, it's hard to ignore how overwhelmingly lucrative these fan bases are. Girls are, to marketers, the most valuable fans of all – if you can capture the rapturous dedication of girl fandom, it's basically a licence to print money. And yet, the young women who generate this staggering income for music stars and brands alike are often derided for their supposed un-seriousness or illegitimacy.

A recent *Vox* article, on the other hand, very seriously pondered why we deride young women when they are the original tastemakers (see: The Beatles, Elvis), essentially creating the very trends the rest of the world follow, from language to fashion and music, and everything in between. Although they didn't arrive at a single answer, it sat somewhere between sexism, cultural conditioning, the historical mistreatment of young women and the penchant for Boomers and Gen X to elevate Gen Z personalities like Greta Thunberg as heroes, while simultaneously ignoring their calls for action.

So, why *do* we hate young female fandom? And why do we see it as ridiculous, hysterical and terribly unserious, despite its undeniable chokehold on pop culture, marketing, social media and company profits?

A short history of female fandom and its gendered allusion to 'mania' known as 'Lisztomania' – no, not the Phoenix song – was one of the first reported moments of mass hysteria in the well-chronicled history of female fandom. Hungarian composer Franz Liszt's first

MICHELLE PITIRIS

Beatles' fans were some of the first to be labelled as suffering from 'mania'.

SUPPLIED

'frenzy' was reported in 1841, and the term was later coined in 1844 to describe the "intense levels of hysteria demonstrated by fans."

As the story goes, "admirers of Liszt would swarm over him, fighting over his handkerchiefs and gloves. Fans would wear his portrait on brooches and cameos. Women would try to get locks of his hair, and whenever he broke a piano string, admirers would try to obtain it in order to make a bracelet."

The psychological connotation – which is certainly no accident – combines all these moments in time into one cultural phenomenon: the crazed female fan.

Sound familiar? Lisztomania, Beatlemania, the scenes outside any One Direction concert in years past, all culminate in one idea, one word: mania. The psychological connotation – which is certainly no accident – combines all these moments in time into one cultural phenomenon: the crazed female fan. But why is female fandom seen as a 'mania'? Why is their passion translated as hysterics?

As Yve Blake points out in her widely-shared TED Talk, 'For The Love of Fangirls', we rarely accuse men – falling to their knees and weeping, or setting fire to the city during soccer riots after their team has lost – of mania. It's perfectly normal for a man to cosplay in another man's jersey, or paint their face in their team's colours, but if women dress up for a Harry Styles concert, it's reported on by the news as some kind of oddity. Is it not the same thing? A passion for what they love? The only difference I can see is that women tend to grow out of it.

While we ritually undermine the intelligence, passion and, quite frankly, the seriousness of young female fans by labelling or dismissing them, we ignore the power of teenage girls that we could instead

harness. Social media has meant that this power has become amplified; no longer do they need to rely on others to make their voices heard, nor to hear each other. We're all just along for the ride. And the viral dances.

The stats? We're talking billions. With a 'B'.

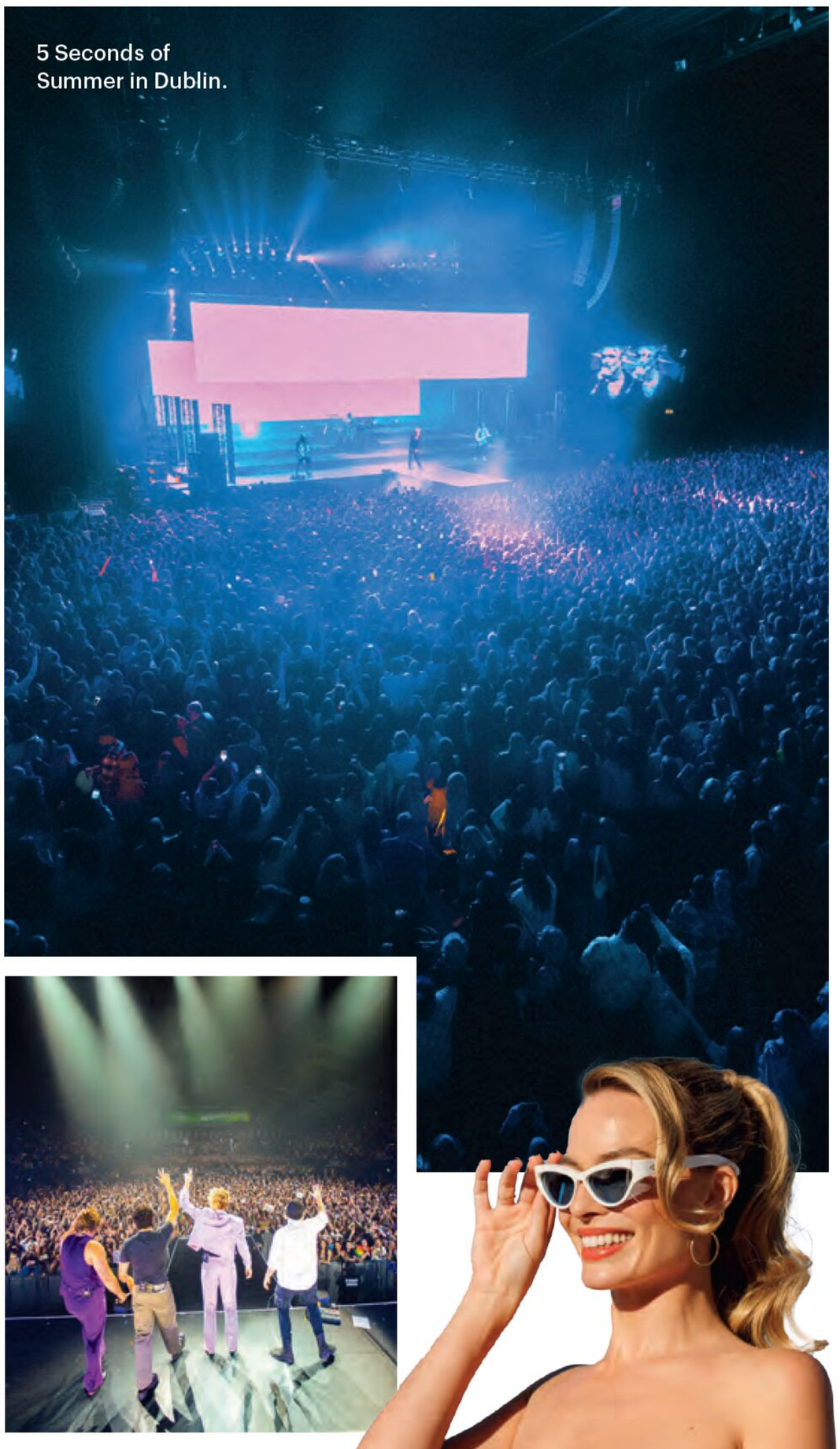
When women commit, the money follows. In 2023, *Barbie* became the highest grossing film ever in Warner Bros. history, and the largest worldwide film release of 2023, grossing over US$2 billion. Earlier that year, Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour became the highest grossing tour by a female artist in history, pulling in $863 million. She was pipped at the post in December 2023, however, as Taylor Swift's Eras Tour officially became the highest grossing music tour ever, becoming the first to surpass US$1 billion in revenue. The film of the same name has also become the highest-grossing US concert film ever, bringing in a global haul of around US$373 million to date.

And it's not just music. Kylie Cosmetics propelled Kylie Jenner to almost-billionaire status by the time she turned twenty-one years old, almost entirely through activating her highly-engaged social media fanbase. Her sister Kim used the same blueprint to build SKIMS, which pulled in a valuation of $5.9 billion in July 2023.

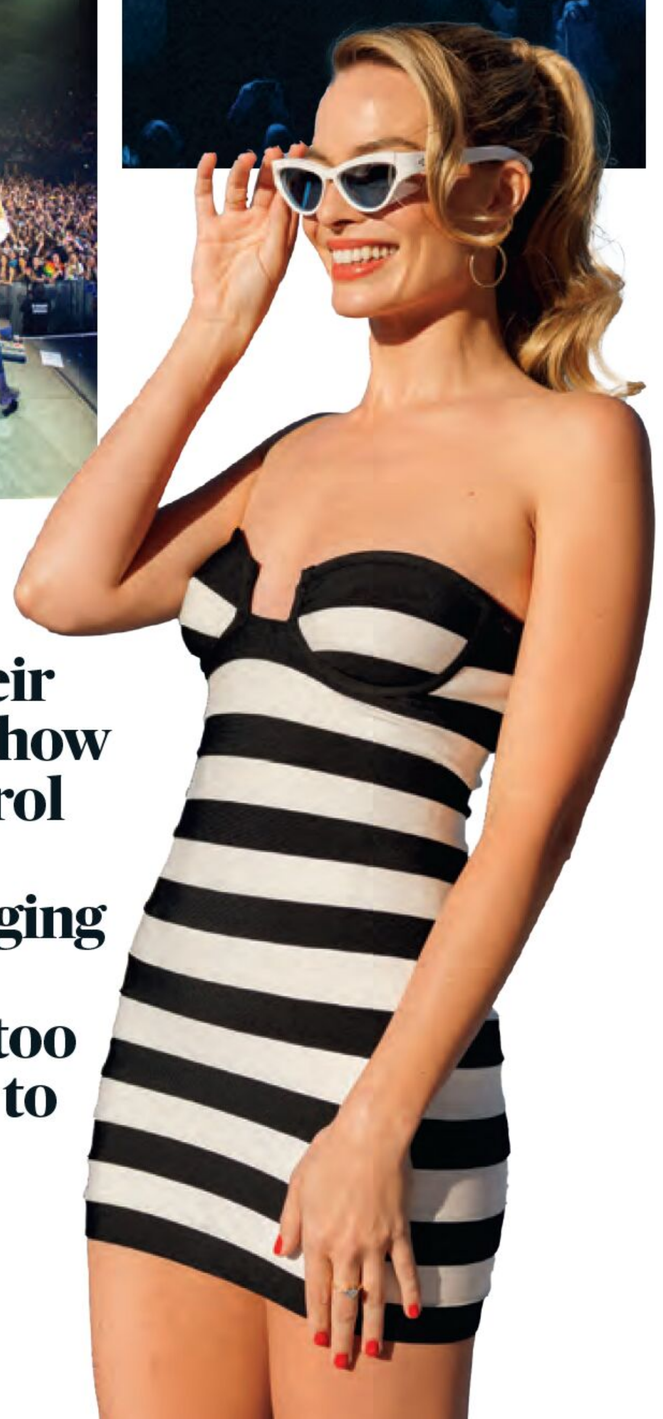
Taylor Swift has even given rise to her own marketing term – the 'Taylor bump' – after the NFL found Taylor Swift's whirlwind romance with Travis Kelce had delivered one of Kelce's games a sixty-three per cent jump in viewership among women aged eighteen to forty-nine. Add a four hundred per cent jump in sales for Kelce's #87 jersey, and you're starting to see the lucrative effects of a young female fanbase on almost any product, in any market. It was likely a surprise to the league, whose previous attempts to pink-package their sport with literal pink jerseys and bedazzled apparel (ugh) had fallen on deaf ears.

So why does the entertainment industry hate female fandom?

The Noughties and 2010s were overwhelmingly a time for



5 Seconds of Summer in Dublin.



For if women were to understand their market power, how would we control them through product messaging that tells them they're too fat, too old, or too ugly to be important?

male-heavy voices to tell us what was good – and the things that were cool, or highbrow, were certainly not the things that teenage girls liked. Online music tastemakers *Pitchfork* routinely excluded reviews of albums at the top of the charts due to a perceived unseriousness of pop music. At the same time, the Warped Tour was welcoming a fifty-three per cent female crowd to their alt-rock festival in 2014 as they were routinely booking almost exclusively male lineups.

As the perception of women as 'unserious' fans of popular culture continued, we also saw the rise of a new kind of male pop star – one that embraced fluid sexuality, and courted female fans while rejecting traditional notions of masculinity. One of these pop stars was, of course, Harry Styles, who had this to say about the historical derision of female fans to *Rolling Stone* in 2017: "Who's to say that young girls who like pop music – short for popular, right? – have worse musical taste than a thirty-year-old hipster guy? That's not up to you to say. Music is something that's always changing. There's no goal posts. Young girls like The Beatles. You gonna tell me they're not serious?"

Ashton Irwin, drummer for Sydney pop rockers 5 Seconds of Summer, is also keenly aware of how young girls have their finger firmly on the pulse of what's popular long before most.

"The young, female fanbases know what's good before anybody else, they always have," he told *Rolling Stone AU/NZ* in 2022. "They make it easy for these awful people who take advantage of that," he continues. "Because they [the fans] all point at this great thing and go, 'That's the good thing'. In a pure way. 'We like these guys'."

But if you thought the days of devaluing the teen girl's market dominance was dead in the water since the TikTok revolution, see: Matt Rife. Compared to Styles, he took a somewhat different approach to amassing a huge, young, mostly female audience that brought him TikTok fame, lucrative sponsorships, and even a Netflix stand-up

RYAN-FLEMING; CAROLINE MCCREDIE

Taylor Swift's shifting of the cultural needle has been dubbed the 'Taylor bump'.

Elvis fans in front of the Graceland Mansion.

EMI MUSIC; ALEX SHANSKY

just waiting to be tapped, but in the end, where is their power? When Greta Thunberg told the Swedish government to reduce carbon emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement after Sweden's hottest summer in 262 years, why didn't they listen?

Besides driving a song to the top of the trending charts on TikTok, what power do we actually imbue in the female, teenage voice? To answer that, we have to go back to my original question – the one at the beginning of this article – because I promised you an answer.

Female fandom is undeniably powerful. The driving forces behind it combine the potent sparkle of millions of teenage girls, flush with increasing buying power, heady, unbridled emotional energy and lots of free time on their hands. So what would happen if we took young female fandom seriously? Report on it in *Forbes* like we do the stock market?

To give young women such power is to piss on the patriarchal systems that society – and, indeed modern capitalism – thrive upon. It would, without hyperbole or irony, upend the top end of town. And at the same time, it would disallow the tired, old advertising ploy of shilling products through driving women's insecurity. For if women were to understand their market power, how would we control them through product messaging that tells them they're too fat, too old, or too ugly to be important? How would we personify feminine power in an $84 face cream if they knew their power came from their passion, their emotion – or their uncanny ability to mobilise a trend in every school across the country before even the most seasoned marketers have spotted it on TikTok?

To quote writer Heinrich Heine, from his 1844 letter which originally coined the term Lisztomania: "Perhaps the solution of the question is not buried in such adventurous depths, but floats on a very prosaic surface."

Yes, perhaps it's really just as simple as Beyoncé herself told us. Who run the world? Girls.

comedy special. Instead of embracing the wisdom of watermelon-loving Styles, Rife decided to use his now-derided 2023 Netflix special *Natural Selection* to alienate his female fanbase with a series of sexist clunkers, including a domestic violence joke that saw him bordering on cancelled. Turns out we still devalue young female voices, even when they're the only reason we're famous, or rich, or influential.

Sure, marketers and record companies might see the looming dollar signs more clearly in the teenage fangirl these days, and trend forecasters might be more aware of their endless spring of inspiration

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THE GREAT GADSBY

Comedy's *enfant terrible* Hannah Gadsby is relishing their anti-hero era

BY **JENNY VALENTISH**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHARLIE ASHFIELD**

THE GREAT **GADSBY**

WE'RE ON our way to the photographic studio when a Dr. Hook & the Medicine Show song blares from the backseat. It's a 1972 earworm, offensive in its inanity: "The Cover of 'Rolling Stone'".

As the lyrics go, the band has done it all, "*But the thrill we've never known / Is the thrill that'll getcha when you get your picture / On the cover of the Rollin' Stone*".

Hannah Gadsby mischievously tucks away their phone. Sharing the back seat is their wife Jenney Shamash, their needy new pup Nuna, and a gigantic bag containing tea, a teapot, and a tea cup that goes everywhere they do.

Gadsby may be bemused at their appointment on our cover, but then, things have been surreal in Gadsbyland for the past five years. Since their Netflix special *Nanette* went interstellar in 2018, the comedian has had two further specials – *Douglas* (2020) and *Something Special* (2023) – and two world tours that bookended the pandemic. They published a memoir – *10 Steps to Nanette* – that was a decade in the writing, gave a TED Talk, graced the cover of *Variety* and became headline fodder for their views.

Finally, the *Nanette* phase has come to a close. Which begs the existential question: where to now?

"This interview has happened at the perfect time because I've barely spoken in two weeks," Gadsby says, looking to Shamash for confirmation. As Gadsby's producer and wife, Shamash gently nudges entertainingly derailed conversations back on track. "I usually approach interviews with, let's just see what they get on the day. But I prepared for this. In a sense, I'm learning how to be a professional."

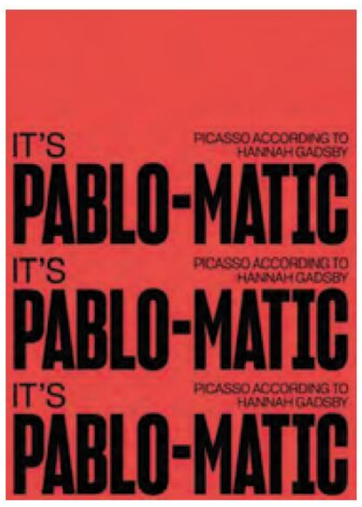
The *Rolling Stone AU/NZ* interview takes place at the headquarters of Token, a leading comedy agency. As is the case in the car, the air con is set to arctic, to peak Gadsby comfort conditions.

That's good. Last time I interviewed them, in 2018, it was in a crowded café with a conveyor belt of journalists. For an autistic person, this promo set-up was less than ideal. One woman stopped at the table to offer her praise, then touched the arm of Gadsby, who seemed to hunch over in the booth one millimetre more.

"Are you *okay*?" the woman asked. Strange question, but actually, such concern was commonplace from anyone who'd seen the visceral *Nanette*, which zeroed in on an assault Gadsby had experienced. Do understand, though, that whatever you see Gadsby deliver, they've spent a good few years processing it before spitting it out as a devastating set.

"Now I don't have to do interviews in cafes – they come here," Gadsby says, wryly gesturing at the boardroom table, laden with tea accoutrements. "People might think of that as diva behaviour, but ultimately it's people who are sucked into the machine trying to create a bubble of safety for themselves. Success has helped my management of autism to the point where I'm really fine for the first time in my life. Money buys access."

Gadsby's career kicked off in 2006, long before they were diagnosed. That year, the Tasmanian comedian won the finals of Raw Comedy, at the age of twenty-eight, with a set that mocked their own body shape as soundly as their hometown of Smithton. For much of their career, they were the butt of their own jokes. Gadsby came of age when gay law reform was a heated topic in Tasmania, doing damage to marginalised people the way the same-sex marriage bill and the Voice Referendum would years later. All this fostered a dislike of gatekeepers that's been a constant in their work.



Clockwise from above: Gadsby's 2023 Netflix special *Something Special;* 2019 TED Talk 'Three ideas. Three contradictions. Or not.'; Gadsby in *Sex Education;* the poster for *It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby.*

> Success has helped my management of autism to the point where I'm really fine for the first time in my life.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: NETFLIX

TRENCH: BURBERRY, SHIRT: INFORMALE, TIE: SHAG, RING: BURBERRY, GLASSES: EYE ST

THE GREAT **GADSBY**

WHEN *Nanette* became a global talking point, with haters declaring it 'not comedy', Gadsby was catapulted out of their reasonably safe bubble of Melbourne audiences and comedy festivals, and developed a high-profile, dysfunctional relationship with Netflix that persists to this day – almost unbelievably.

In 2021, Netflix faced backlash for transphobic comments made by Dave Chappelle in his special *The Closer*. CEO Ted Sarandos sent an internal memo, leaked to *The Daily Beast*, that protested: "We are working hard to ensure marginalised communities aren't defined by a single story. So we have *Sex Education, Orange is the New Black*, *Control Z*, Hannah Gadsby and Dave Chappelle all on Netflix...".

Gadsby took a box of matches to the bridge Sarandos probably thought he was building, addressing him in an Instagram post. In part: "[...] I would prefer if you didn't drag my name into your mess... You didn't pay me nearly enough to deal with the real-world consequences of the hate speech dog-whistling you refuse to acknowledge, Ted. Fuck you and your amoral algorithm cult..."

To this, Chappelle added that he'd be willing to meet with the transgender community on three conditions, one of which was "you must admit that Hannah Gadsby is not funny".

The next year, Netflix released Ricky Gervais' *SuperNature*, also accused of having transphobic and homophobic content. Gadsby dismissed him as not being "a nuanced thinker". Since then, the three comedians' Netflix specials have continued to awkwardly overlap. In 2024, we've seen new releases from Chappelle and Gervais (whose continued obsession with cancel culture is cannibalising itself), with Gadsby's pertinently named new special out now: *Hannah Gadsby's Gender Agenda*.

"I had to be intentional about what I did," Gadsby says, of accepting Netflix's invitation to come back. "I figured, if I don't continue, then I'm just taking myself out of the conversation. So along with getting a deal for *Something Special*, we attached a special of gender-queer artists."

Hannah Gadsby's Gender Agenda has sets from DeAnne Smith, Chloe Petts, Jes Tom and Dahlia Belel. Gadsby has a presence between sets, to "dangle the bait".

"The few of us with a platform – you know, Wanda Sykes, and Mae Martin – we're trying to push back against this new wave of phobia. It's a different landscape to what I grew up in, so I can't give people actual advice on how to navigate this scene. The only way I can help is to give them a platform."

March and April, it turns out, are big months. Gadsby is performing a new show, *Woof!*, at the 2024 Melbourne Comedy Festival from March 28th to April 20th following its run in Sydney.

"*Woof!* is not a logical step from [previous live show] *Banana Palace*," Gadsby says. "It's many odd steps in many different directions. Let's just say the theme is anxiety. I try to be relatable. You know?"

Gadsby also appeared in the final season of Netflix hit *Sex Education*, as radio station boss Celia. Previously, they'd acted in *Underbelly*, *Please Like Me* and *The Librarians*, but this was a more formidable prospect, particularly alongside Gillian Anderson – "not a bucket of hugs, at first".

"I was terrified I was gonna ruin it," Gadsby says. "I found myself playing to the room instead of to the script. Like, 'I'm going to make the cameraman laugh'. So I had to dial that back."

Gadsby became a favourite with US talk show giants, and duly bit the hand that feeds at *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Women in Entertainment Gala. They used the opportunity to lampoon hosts who – at the peak of the Me Too movement – were keen to give their good-guy takes on bad guys.

"It's a strange world," Gadsby says of celebrity. "As somebody who's barely got a grasp on normal life, I'm way out of my depth. Who do you trust? I take things at face value, which is not how you approach Hollywood. But they *are* nice. Like, it's not slimy. They just over-promise and under-deliver; that's the business model."

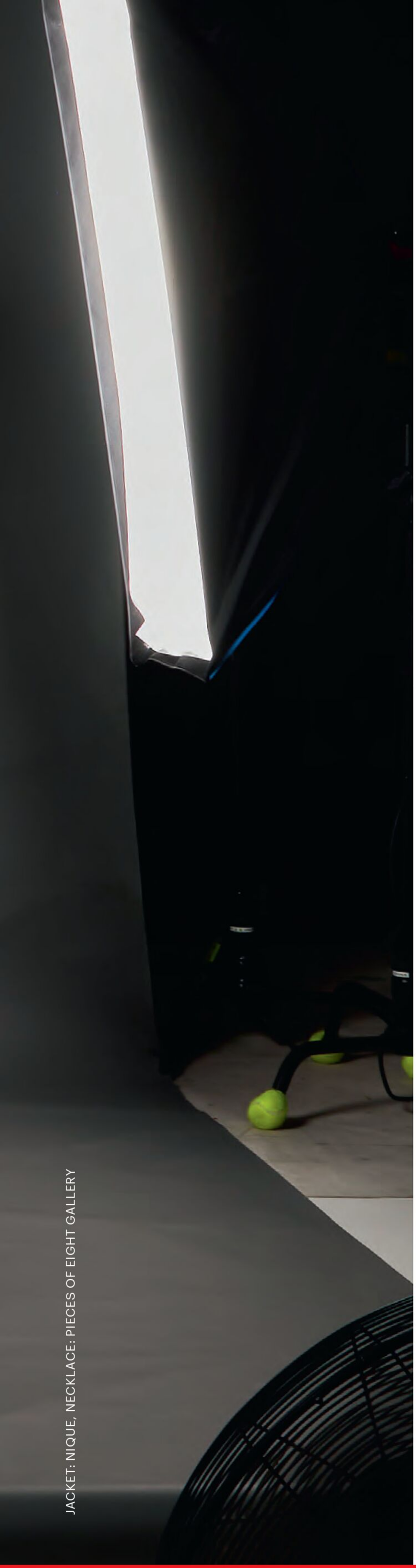
One reliable constant has been Shamash. Amid the chaos of 2021, the pair married in Gadsby's front yard in regional Victoria. They'd met in New York on a trip to perform *Nanette*. As the story goes, Shamash was the first person Gadsby met when they got off the plane. The fact that Shamash had an advantage in having read Gadsby's memoir was not confronting, apparently.

"That's the dream," Gadsby declares. "The idea of dating is horrific to me, because I'm really interested in other people, but I don't like talking about myself. Now I have a book, so it was: read that and then let's talk about you."

The romance was immortalised in 2021's live show *Body of Work* (aka *Something Special* on Netflix), a more feel-good show, right down to the colour palette. "Studies have shown that one of the most soothing ideas to a human eye is the receding skyline – the greens and blues of

“It was my creative decision not to engage in the fallout that I deliberately manufactured. I played them like a fiddle.

NECKLACE: PIECES OF EIGHT GALLERY



JACKET: NIQUE, NECKLACE: PIECES OF EIGHT GALLERY

foreground, middle-ground and background skies," Gadsby says, chuffed someone noticed.

Gadsby has long exercised a duty of care to their audience, but I'm interested in how an artist can set their boundaries once their personal story has served as a lifeline. Their part in the transaction is surely done, but how can that be communicated to people who are in crisis, and who might want more?

"It's a really interesting question that I think about a lot. It's not inappropriate behaviour, so I don't want to make people feel that way. *Nanette* was quite traumatic so I still feel a sense of responsibility there. But also, I had to put some very strong boundaries down immediately. I struggle with interpersonal relationships. You've got to find the balance of processing the world that you're living in, without trying to be something for other people."

GADSBY is clumsy. There's been a litany of broken bones in their lifetime to back this up. But when they 'broke comedy', as they put it in their TED Talk, it couldn't have been more deliberate. And since then, they've taken a pickaxe to the art world.

"This is the first time I've spoken about it publicly," they say, practically cracking their knuckles.

In June 2023, *It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby*, opened at the Brooklyn Museum, to shock and horror. Now, Gadsby has a solid history of art criticism – live shows such as *The Exhibitionist*; a lecture series for the National Gallery of Victoria; and *Artscape* and *Hannah Gadsby's Oz* for the ABC. But when they were invited by the Brooklyn Museum to curate a Picasso exhibition in June 2023, it was as a "noted Picasso hater" as *The Sydney Morning Herald* put it in a scathing review.

Picasso has been living rent-free in Gadsby's head since their teens, when they wondered why he was such "a cult". He was practically the Taylor Swift of manufacturing his own fame, they note. Years later, when Annie Leibovitz shot Gadsby for the 2018 *Vanity Fair* Hall of Fame, they used Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein as inspiration.

"I studied art history at university. That was fucking decades ago," Gadsby says. "I went in as a comedian and that's how I was going to play it. I had my own artwork in the exhibition. That's funny to me."

Gadsby thinks they were approached by the Brooklyn Museum because the institution is itself plagued by snobbery. "The accusation from the elite is that they pander to the popular. I was approached as a pot stirrer. I've gone in through the backdoor, and that's what makes the art world angry."

They determined not to centre Picasso, who Gadsby has long maligned as a misogynist and abuser, and so by the time the visitor reached the end, Picasso's works were entirely replaced by works from feminist artists.

"I like to destabilise things. So there was proper historical information and then my contribution, which was dick jokes; like in the audio tour I was calling him PP. I emasculated Picasso – and not sophisticatedly. Because there's an element of that in Picasso's own work."

> "I've gone in through the backdoor, and that's what makes the art world angry.

Hostile reviews and think-pieces came in thick and fast, but Gadsby didn't read them. Gadsby becomes fiercely animated, like a villain outlining the sheer genius of their masterplan.

"I wasn't going to invest in that controversy, which would have been the PR smart thing, because all you have to do to be successful now is to harvest notoriety. But my artwork was finished. It was my creative decision not to engage in the fallout that I deliberately manufactured. Nobody seems to want to acknowledge that. I played them like a fiddle. And the purpose of that was basically I'm just saying, 'You're stupid'. It's basic. It's a schoolyard tactic. And you know what the art world did? They said, '*You're* stupid'." Gadsby flashes a triumphant look. "Yeah, I'm a comedian. What's your fucking excuse?"

So where to now? Gadsby isn't entirely sure – nor sure of who their audience even is anymore – but they've been putting some safeguards in place. For the sake of their sanity, they've learned to see Brand Hannah – the version in the public eye – as a team project. They're dialling back autobiographical material to try and find a way of living "reasonably unconsciously" and they're trying to maintain a "cruising altitude", rather than dizzying highs and lows, to eliminate bad decision making.

"I'm in a fairly enviable position, but it's very easy to look back on the last five years and say, 'Perhaps I didn't make the most of my opportunity and perhaps I didn't play the game well enough'," Gadsby says. "And then I have to remind myself I *never* played the game. My career was built out of parallel play. With *Nanette*, it just so happened that the zeitgeist and my game that I was playing on my own connected."

To get back to that state of play, in December 2023 Gadsby booked a modest eight nights at the Arts Centre Melbourne to toy around with new ideas and reconnect with audiences. *Banana Palace* was not so much testing a new set as an experiment. Gadsby was reading Barbra Streisand's autobiography *My Name Is Barbra*, which quickly became a 'special interest' hyperfixation.

"So then I decided, with a week to go, that perhaps what I'll do is write letters to Barbra and read them on stage. I thought it would be the most vulnerable thing in the world to explore being in a parasocial relationship with Barbra Streisand – parasocial meaning she doesn't know. I thought, how interesting would it be if I performed my own parasocial relationship, in front of people who might possibly have a parasocial relationship with *me*."

Gadsby also recently took Shamash to Smithton, on the northwest coast of Tasmania, where they grew up as the youngest of five. The town hasn't yet erected a statue, but Gadsby was lifted to find the place transformed – particularly when they revisited their old school.

"I was ready to be triggered and scared, but then a girl I went to school with who works there now gave us a private tour. There were queer and transgender flags, and programs in place for queer kids," Gadsby says. "It was really interesting. I feel like Tasmania is quite proud of me. I'm currently in some backlash waters, but that's not coming from home base."

Thinking back to the woman in the café who'd asked if they were okay, Gadsby says they've heard that question a lot in recent years – another wave after the *Pablo-matic* backlash.

"Yes, I'm fine," they say, "but I also don't quite understand my scale in the world. You know, there's a lot of people who hate me, and I do know that, but I forget the scale of it."

It's too tempting not to slip into the role of psych and ask: *And how does that feel?*

"Well, it keeps ya humble," they say amiably. "I don't want to be that person who's just going, 'Fuck the haters', because I'm doing that stuff deliberately and that tension is where the interesting stuff is. I just have to really think about what sort of life I want to lead – and I don't think I want to lead a very dynamic one, but I just seem to keep finding myself in very dynamic places, despite all my best intentions to quit and recede."

JACKET: NIQUE, NECKLACE: PIECES OF EIGHT GALLERY

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High Scores:||

How Game Music Turned Entertainment Into Art

BY PAUL F. VERHOEVEN

FIFTEEN HOURS into the sprawling open-world Western *Red Dead Redemption*, you finally make it to Mexico. You land upon a dusty, cracked mesa and approach the horse tethered nearby. And as you begin to canter out into the sunburnt wilderness before you, something miraculous happens.

A José González song begins to play. The whole damned thing, beginning to end, out of the blue.

For many gamers, this was a watershed moment: a song by a modern artist, drifting in from out of nowhere. It turned the game into something truly cinematic, and it made an entire generation of gamers aware of what music in games was truly capable of doing.

SUPPLIED

The track, “Far Away”, is a reworked song by González’ band Junip. “When the *Red Dead* team reached out to me,” says González via Zoom from Sweden, “I felt like I didn’t have the time, but I came up with the idea to use a Junip song, and sort of make a cover of… myself! I didn’t have lyrics for the song yet, but they gave me some key words. I didn’t see any videos, or any animation, but I knew, loosely, what the game was about. But it really was just keywords. Lonely… cowboy…” he laughs, trying to recall their prompts. “A character riding in the desert, some fighting, some family issues… So then, I started writing the lyrics.”

The song became iconic, prompting players to replay the game just to relive this moment, over and over. At once haunting and defiant, “Far Away” instantly elevates the entire experience, turning our hero John Marston’s journey into the stuff of legend.

“I re-tuned the guitar very, very low, so that the E string was tuned down to B, to make it sound even more… doomy, you know? Enigmatic,” says González. “And it’s one of the few songs I recorded on my own tape recorder – the same type of tape recorder Paul Simon used to use.”

I ask José what his first time riding into Mexico in the game was like, as the musician who made the moment. “They launched it and pretty quickly people started posting it on YouTube, and it wasn’t until then that I finally saw the moment where the music came on. So I didn’t get that epic moment myself, but I did come to understand how many people found it so moving! Cinematic. Like you’re in a movie yourself.”

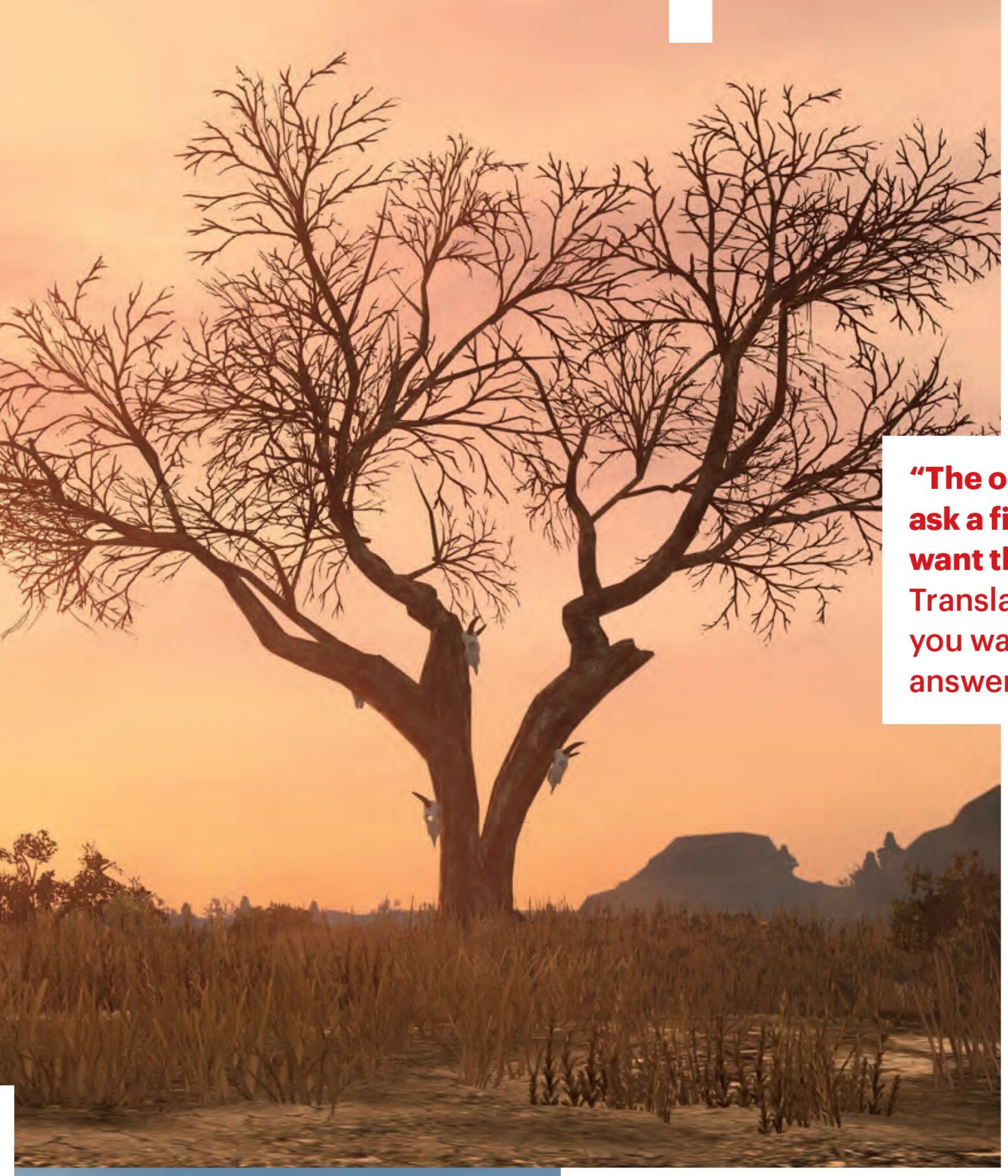
There’s a certain irony that the standout track in a game about boundless freedom, about forging your own path, saw José corralled into such a removed creative process. I started to worry. Is this normal? Is video game music always made by someone being kept, perhaps deliberately, far away from the very thing they’re making music for?

Arguments about whether or not games are art abound, but game music has the potential to settle the debate for good. Game music, done well, edifies and elevates. And for many composers of game music, José’s inclusion in *Red Dead Redemption* was a watershed moment.

“That José song is incredible,” says Austin Wintory, Grammy-nominated composer for *Journey*. “Incredible. And speaking of Westerns, I’m reminded of what [film composer] Jerry Goldsmith said: if you’re scoring a scene for a man on a horse galloping away, don't score the gallop. Score the fear of the rider. Music can add the thing which all the other elements are pointing to, but can’t necessarily address themselves.

“So what makes us truly feel that we’re Kratos? Or Spider-Man? Or John Marston? Music makes you feel like you’re really there by, ironically, playing you something that isn’t there!”

José González’s “Far Away” makes an iconic appearance in *Red Dead Redemption* (above).



FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: ROCKSTAR GAMES; KALLE GUSTAFSSON; SUPPLIED; TED SUN

Above: a beast attacks in *God of War: Ragnarok*. **Right:** The game's composer, Bear McCreary.

It gives voice to the subtext of the story, the implications of the environment."

"Can I add to that?" chimes in Bear McCreary, award-winning composer for the superb new *God of War: Ragnarok*. He and Austin are good friends, and they've agreed to a three-way, cross-continental call. "There's a deeper level in gaming than in other art forms!" Bear exclaims. "You aren't just meant to relate to the protagonist... You're meant to feel! You are that protagonist! So what makes us truly feel that we're Kratos? Or Spider-Man? Or John Marston? Music makes you feel like you're really there by, ironically, playing you something that isn't there!"

Game music has to do more than just flare up and be heard, though. Gamers steer the action and, unlike cinema, the consumer sets the pace. So the music needs to be crafted as an almost living, dynamic thing. "As the composer, I gotta make the music like an engine that's idling," says Austin. "So that when you do encounter a moment, it can respond to you."

Bear nods vigorously. "Each player's experience," he exalts, "feels like there's a conductor watching, cueing an orchestra in real time, to their exact movements."

It wasn't always like this, though. Game music, in its infancy, was bound within and hampered by myriad technological restrictions. Early game consoles had incredible limitations when it came to music. Then, it levelled up.

"The only thing you ever need to ask a filmmaker is 'What do you want the audience to feel?' Translate that to games? 'What do you want the gamer to feel?' That answers everything."

"When I was five, music entered games in a permanent, meaningful way," explains Bear. "*Mario*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania*. We grew up with that music in our heads! And when we became professionals, we were gamers, so we'd ask questions, like 'How come every time I die I hear the same stinger, over and over? How come I hear the bad guys' music before I know there's a bad guy nearby?' Every time that happens, you're reminded you're playing a game... not living an experience."

Austin's mentor, Elmer Bernstein, was one of the great film composers of all time. "He kept saying to me, over and over, that the only thing you ever need to ask a filmmaker is 'What do you want the audience to feel?' That's it. Translate that to games? 'What do you want the gamer to feel?' That answers everything."

Think again about John Marston. Riding out into Mexico and hearing José's "Far Away" makes you feel like the lone hero of a story, but it also makes you feel like the possibilities are endless. The world is dangerous, and anything could happen to you. Austin and Bear's works are the gentler iterations of game music. Smart, deferential, operatic stuff. "Far Away" in *Red Dead* can feel like something of an anomaly.

That is, until you dive into the universe of *Alan Wake*. *Alan Wake 2* came out late last year and was met with staggering critical acclaim. It's the story of a writer who becomes trapped in a dark dimension where his writing creates and warps reality, and from which he can't escape. *Alan Wake 2* takes the "Far Away" ball and pelts it... well, as far away as possible.

Alan Wake 2 is the brainchild of Sam Lake. "A huge part of *Alan Wake 2*, for me, is using different mediums," Sam says. "And bringing them together in new ways inside the game. And really, that's very fitting for *Alan Wake 2*, which is all about works of art coming true – and music is one of them."

Alan Wake 2 is broken up into episodes like a TV show. When the credits roll at the end of each one, a song plays. In *Alan Wake*, the songs were all licensed – the first was Roy Orbison's "In Dreams", a funhouse mirror reflection of José's beatific "Far Away" moment.

Here, though, every track you hear was composed and performed specifically for the game.

"What we did in *Alan Wake*, with the end songs", says Sam, "We thought, 'this time, what if we create those songs ourselves? And then they'd actually be about the story, an extension of the story.' So we had this crazy, wonderful songwriting camp, where [Helsinki-based production house] Fried Music brought twenty songwriters in.

"I wrote this thick stack of story notes, explaining where the music was going to go, the themes, and I gave them my poems to use for lyrics. It was awesome. So we divided them up into different studios, then they started doing demos, and we did that for two days, after which we had twenty-three awesome song demos. And I had this really hard task of, 'now I need to pick seven!'" Sam laughs, then groans.

Poe, the L.A.-based songwriter, pitched in too, composing a song for the episodes of the game where you're playing as Alan, trying desperately to escape a looping, distorted version of New York City. "So her song, 'This Road'," explains Sam, "is played every time you finish an episode in the Dark Place. But then, we had the idea that the song evolves as you play! We only get the first verse the first time, and it keeps on changing each time, until the whole song – nine-and-a-half minutes of it – play out!"

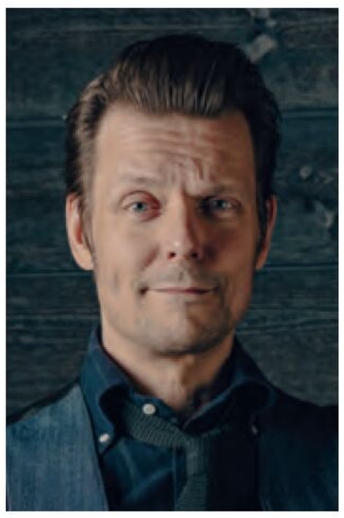
Alan Wake 2 also contains a fictional band named Old Gods of Asgard, and they're played by real-life band Poets of the Fall. In *Alan Wake 2*, the band is a crucial part of the story, as is their music. "They play the Old Gods, the fictional band, but we've been using more of their songs and we've integrated them into the experience more than ever."

Sam is deliriously proud of the role Old Gods play in *Alan Wake 2*. He should be – as the story unfolds, their music becomes a righteous, defiant rebel yell towards the forces of evil. They've developed such a following, in fact, that they took to the stage at the Game Awards 2023 and blew the roof off the place, an appearance that astonishingly led to the Old Gods of Asgard album *Rebirth: Greatest Hits* entering the Top Ten of the global iTunes album chart.

And back when they were called the Spike Video Game Awards, who played the same gig in 2010, sending the assembled crowd into a reverent catatonia?

José González, playing "Far Away".

When I talk with Stephen Barton, who recently won a Best Score Soundtrack for Video Games and Other Interactive Media Grammy with co-composer Gordy Haab for *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor*, he's literally running offstage after performing with an orchestra in Belgium. He's been conducting pieces from the third season of *Picard*, some of the greatest music ever to grace the *Star Trek* universe. I can still hear the crowd cheering faintly in the background.



Clockwise from top: *Alan Wake 2; Star Wars Jedi: Survivor;* Old Gods of Asgard; *Alan Wake* creator Sam Lake.

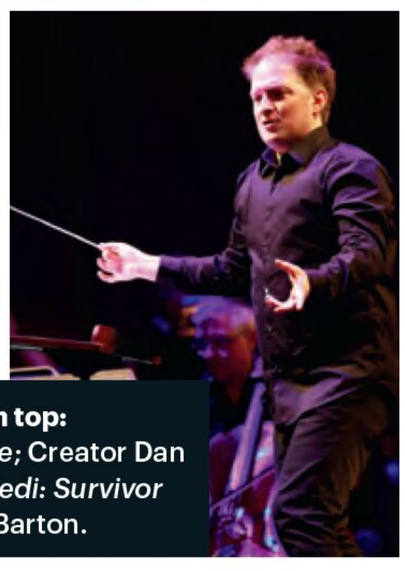
"If you want a franchise to grow, you have to push the boundaries musically."

"It's an interesting thing, having to carry the legacy of a franchise with your music," says Stephen. "But at the end of the day, we're fans of this music. What you absolutely don't want to do is be the one to break the thing! But if you want a franchise to grow, you have to push the boundaries musically."

We start talking more about game music and the topic of José's "Far Away" arises. Stephen lights up. "You're not going to believe this, but in *Jedi: Survivor*, we have a sequence we worked on for a long time. We wanted to underscore a relationship, and so we wanted to score that in a way that was different from just a love theme. And there's a sequence where they're riding through the desert on these creatures... and we used the going down to Mexico scene in *Red Dead* as a likeness!"

"We did an arrangement of one of our cantina songs by this Israeli band called Tatran," he continues. "And that's what I love about game music. You can pitch things and try them out! You're not restricted. You can say, 'How do we relate this to wider life? How do we make people feel this?' Music lets you handle these things in such a sophisticated way."

Then, just as we're about to finish the call, he stops me. "You know what game music I love?



Anti-clockwise from top: *Untitled Goose Game;* Creator Dan Golding*; Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* composer Stephen Barton.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: SUPPLIED; FRANK MICELOTTA (PICTURE GROUP); HOUSE HOUSE; LIN JIE KONG

Untitled Goose Game. That is one of my all-time favourites. I'd be in the studio recording *Jedi*, and I'd call home and hear my daughter in the background crying with laughter."

I tell this to Dan Golding, the Aussie composer who scored *Untitled Goose Game*, the global success story made in Melbourne which sees a tiny, awful goose terrorising a sleepy British hamlet as reworked Debussy tinkles away in the background. He's gobsmacked by the praise. "I can't believe that he said that," says Dan, "given how much I love his music!"

Untitled Goose Game's piano score suits its absolute creep of a protagonist perfectly. But why Debussy?

"Well, mostly because we didn't know what we were doing!" laughs Dan. "The game has dynamic music which reacts to what you're doing – not because it was the plan all along, but because I created a Debussy backing for the trailer, one which slowed down and sped up to suit the edit. Then we had countless comments online saying, 'It's so amazing how the music responds to the game!' We had a meeting two weeks later where we were like, 'Uh, I guess we gotta figure out how to do this now!"

Dynamic music is notoriously difficult to create due to the music itself needing to react to everything happening on screen in a truly kinetic, almost loving way. It's also part of the reason why Barton was floored by Dan's work.

"We did Debussy over two performances," says Dan, "one radically different from what you'd normally hear at a concert, and the game cuts between the two to a really wild degree. I mean, the first piece in the game would normally go for two-and-a-half minutes – we've chopped it up 347 times and the game chooses which version of those to play, depending on what you're doing in the game."

This is why *Untitled Goose Game* is so fantastic: because the music does exactly what Bear said. It puts you inside the Goose's head. The Goose, and the score, are pure, unadulterated chaos. Terrorising a small British village as a goose – source of French culinary staple, goose liver pate – whilst French composer Debussy plays? Pure anarchy.

"In fact, the vinyl release of the score is equally diabolical – it features a double groove, meaning you never know which version of the score you're going to get. And then, at the very end of the side, it gets stuck in an endless loop of goose honks," explains Dan. The record is the goose.

So maybe you're a cowboy riding out into Mexico, staring into the void. Or maybe you're a goose waddling out into an idyllic village, honking into the void. But either way, if you're feeling something in your gut at that moment, odds are it's the music that made it happen.

And it's the music that'll stick with you in the end. ®

Play On

Once you've listened to all of the music made by the composers interviewed in this piece, check out these other deep cuts.

"Riding - Night"
Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (Manama Katoaka, Yasukai Iwata, Hajime Wakai)

"It's Too Late to Love You Now"
Kentucky Route Zero (Ben Babbitt)

"Aquatic Ambience"
Donkey Kong Country (David Wise)

"Crossroads"
Hollow Knight (Christopher Larkin)

"Chrono Trigger"
Chrono Trigger (Yasunori Mitsuda)

"Wii Shop Channel Theme
(Wii Shopping Channel) Kazumi Totaka

"Title Screen Theme"
Solstice (Tim Follin)

"A Moment's Peace"
Dark Souls (Yuji Takenouchi)

"Resistance and Extermination"
Gravity Rush (Kohei Tanaka)

"Beneath the Mask (Rain)"
Persona 5 (Shoji Meguro)

Females in Focus

To celebrate Women's History Month, Amy Taylor of Amyl and The Sniffers, Tkay Maidza, Tori Forsyth and eight other local artists were photographed for *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*. They bring their daring, strong, vulnerable and unflappable composure to the following pages for a photo essay which celebrates women leading the way in Australian music. In their own words, they each detail their vision for the future of women in the music industry, and what legacy they hope to leave for the next generation of female artists.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING WERE
CONDUCTED BY THE AWARD-WINNING

Michelle Pitiris

Charlie Collins

*“*My vision is that there will be more women headlining festivals, particularly women of colour, and we will continue to have a voice that doesn’t get overthrown. The legacy I hope to leave behind is that it’s okay to be completely raw and real. Life can look so glamorous on the outside, especially on social media, but sometimes it’s even more rock ‘n’ roll to also reveal what goes on behind the curtains. Use your platform to inspire others on a deeper level and encourage other women to reach and stand up for what they believe in.

Charlie Collins wears stylist’s dress, Prada loafers, own jewellery.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Amy Chen**

Blusher

“

Our vision is that women can be both soft and strong in the music industry, not needing to put a brave face on or change themselves to fit into a box, but instead existing in an industry that welcomes and empowers them for who they are and what they’re great at. The next generation of female artists and producers will have more people to look up to and a clearer path ahead of them because of the women paving the way today. Our dream is to be the band we would have wanted to see when we were younger. We hope we can inspire women to start bands with their friends, to take creative control over their work and their vision and feel empowered to get their hands into every aspect of the music industry.

Blusher wears Gail Sorronda (Lauren), Zara dress (Miranda), stylist’s own top and skirt (Jade), stylist’s jewellery.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

> **For women to make as much shit music as men do.**
>
> ***Amy Taylor***
> *(Amyl and The Sniffers)*

Amy Taylor wears stylist's own singlet & shorts, Sportsgirl boots.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

Tkay Maidza

“I just really hope there is a space where all the different types of women of different genres and backgrounds can exist in any way that they want without feeling like outcasts. The legacy I want to leave is one of an African Australian who had all odds against them and was a part of the first generation to break out of the solid boundaries of genres. I think it’s also important to show that the African diaspora can successfully move to a new country and fulfil their dreams from absolutely nothing.

Tkay Maidza wears own jacket, gloves and jewellery.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

Mia “Wray

I’d love to see more women in the ‘behind the scenes’ world of putting a live show together. From a touring point of view, there is so much demand, both emotionally and physically, and women have a natural understanding of the ebb and flow. I’d feel so much more supported as a performer, and might even do a better job on stage, if there were more women around because I would feel understood. It’s that female energy that I can lean on that I can’t really do with an all-male crew and I end up craving it a lot. So if you’re reading this and you’re thinking about a non-performing or performing role in the music industry, I encourage you to go for it. Even if you can’t see someone like you doing it, just find a good mentor and work hard to get where you want to go. The legacy I hope to leave is to inspire others to ‘be real’, like cut the bullshit and be bold, look silly, be modest or not, speak up at the risk of being ‘too emotional’ or ‘bossy’.

Mia Wray wears Racy & Lucky shirt, blazer from Masons.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

George Alice

“I hope in years to come the presence of women in such a diverse and exciting industry is higher than before. Most importantly, I want to see women welcomed in all spaces, including behind the scenes. I’d like to hear our voices without fear of being too loud, too bossy, too outspoken, too difficult. It is such an exciting time to be a woman in music so I hope this excitement and the space created by those before us and the women around me will only expand. It is one of the greatest honours and privileges of my life being a woman in music and I can only hope the path I pave is worthy of the incredible women next to come.

George Alice wears stylist’s blazer and latex gloves.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

Moreton

“

All songs win. Your expression is precious. You are a dancing skeleton on a planet covered in flowers hurtling through an infinity of stars on a pale blue dot. Play, stick your neck out, make the thing. It’s always beautiful. Imagine taking the pressure off. No more debut culture, no obsession with youth, perfection, comparison, metrics. Imagine fostering patience, risk-taking and experimentation. Nuanced, long-standing careers. Imagine the people we’d hear from if that’s how it was. I want to hear those albums, those voices.

Moreton wears vintage Christian Dior dress, Simone Rocha bows, Doc Marten boots, stylist’s gloves.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

Alice Skye

I want women to feel able to just be themselves — whatever that is — and not only be accepted but, receive their flowers! I don't often think about being a woman until I'm made to. Maybe because I'm avoiding thinking about the extra barriers and the damage to my confidence over the years that mightn't have happened if I wasn't a short, quiet, eager to please "young woman". I want less fear, less judgement, less forced competition, less singling out, less expectations. To make room for more nurturing, natural growth, more accessibility, more storytelling, more listening.
I yearn for a cultural shift that goes beyond tokenism and performance. If I'm to leave a legacy, I hope it contributes to the communities that have cared for me — for First Nations, queer, sick, disabled, insane or mentally ill women to be seen in the sun of all their strength, beauty and knowledge. Recent events, I think or I hope, emphasise how important it is to recognise and address different struggles — for a society and music culture where community, stories and safety can thrive.

Alice Skye wears vintage top, stylist's own pants, jewellery and socks, Alice's own shoes.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Kahlii Morrison**

Georgia Nott (Broods)

“More than anything I hope the industry can become a safe place for women and all marginalised people to exist in and create. Music should reflect the diversity of people as a whole. For that to be the case, the industry needs to be a place that fosters and nurtures vulnerability rather than exploits it.

Georgia Nott wears stylist’s t-shirt, own boots and jewellery.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Amy Chen**

JOY.

“I ultimately wish for women to succeed in a safe environment. To be recognised and appreciated for their genuine talent, work ethic, skills and contributions. I hope women can feel confident in themselves, and not succumb to any pressure to change who they are. I also want equal pay and opportunities. My wish is that the industry will arrive at a place in which women can trust their intuition, to go after what they want, push the boundaries and not be fearful to achieve their goals. I’ve not thought much of a legacy; sometimes it feels I am stabbing in the dark. I’m grateful to those women who have walked so I could run. In all honesty, I hope my contribution to the music industry and to the next generation of female artists is much the same, in that one day I can look back and see that I have ignited a path or a dream for someone else as well. I’d like to lead by the example of staying persistent whilst navigating a difficult industry, without much guidance along the way. I hope to leave a legacy of determination, because in the end nothing in life really comes easily, and most of my life is still ahead of me.

JOY. wears Dion Lee blazer, corset and pants.
Hair by **Matt Ashton**
Make up by **Amy Chen**

FEMALES IN FOCUS:
A PHOTO ESSAY
BY MICHELLE PITIRIS

Tia Gostelow

*“*I envision a future music industry where gender is irrelevant and ceases to be a barrier, and where artistry is at the forefront. Being booked for festivals, played on radio stations or being added to playlists should be based on the quality of the art, not how many followers we have or what we look like, fitting into a mould. I’ve always been adamant that if I’m offered an opportunity, I want it to be because I have made good music, not because I’m a woman or a First Nations artist to meet the diversity quota. I hope that opportunities are abundant, recognition is deserved and creativity knows no bounds. As for the legacy I hope to leave for the next generation of female artists, I aim to be a catalyst for supporting and encouraging emerging artists, especially from regional areas. I think remaining authentic to who you are and what you want to do is something I’ve held close to me throughout my career. I always tell people to follow their gut and trust what feels right to you, because it’s there to protect and guide you. I aspire to let people know that no matter their gender, age or where they come from, it’s entirely possible to make a career for yourself in the music industry.

Tia Gostelow wears
Aje shirt, stylist’s jewellery.
HMUA by **Marlene Olsson**

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National Affairs

NO MUSIC ON A DEAD PLANET:

Why Musicians Are Embracing Sustainability

By VIVIENNE KELLY

ISTOCK-1176669654 GRIGOREV_VLADIMIR

Clockwise: Green Music Australia's BYO Bottle campaign; singer-songwriter Woodes; Green Music Australia CEO Berish Bilander and artist Montaigne.

From Coldplay's use of kinetic energy dancefloors and energy-storing stationary bikes on their current tour, to Massive Attack's festival powered by renewable energy, artists are putting sustainability at the forefront, including many Australian musicians intent on taking their eco-friendly message to the masses.

THINK OF a song that's changed your mind. Opened your eyes. Ignited a fire. Let loose a flood of emotions and ideas.

Now think of an instance when you heard it. Chances are, you'll have at least one vivid memory of the music or lyrics engulfing you and the surrounding environment. It could have been around a campfire. At a wet (and wild) festival. Sitting on a clifftop, mountaintop or rooftop. Or even just staring out the window on a bus.

Whether it was banal or beautiful, songs – and our experiences with them – become intrinsically linked to the environment we're in, the nature we're surrounded by and the land we're on.

As the climate crisis intensifies then, it's little surprise that musicians are well placed to deliver some powerful messages about what we're doing to the planet, and that they're making a lot of noise about what to do next.

My Rugged Home

Aussie musician Elle Graham, who performs as Woodes, has always had an intense and inseparable connection to the natural environment around her. She's the child of a marine biologist and park ranger, and grew up in a National Park in North Queensland.

She can't separate herself or her music from the natural world, and there's an immense pride in being connected to Australia's unique flora and fauna, which is only amplified when she's splitting her time between Australia and the US.

"It's so cool to see what Australia is to the rest of the world, and I think we have a really beautiful relationship with the rugged, and it's almost like you can spot an Australian overseas. There's this really beautiful connection with nature and wildlife, and just sort of weathering it, and the tough energy, and it makes me really proud and really protective of this beautiful country," she tells *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*.

Oli Leimbach from Lime Cordiale believes this international vision of ourselves, combined with the devastating 2019 bushfires, has compelled people to stop and think about what might be at risk should environmental degradation continue.

"The bushfires were a big awakening for a lot of people," he says. "Post bushfires, more people are aware of how much they actually love the environment. Every Australian, especially when they're overseas, is boasting about Australian landscapes and our flora and fauna and our dangerous spiders and all these things. And it would be pretty devastating to see these things change."

Melbourne-raised Sheona Urquhart Smångs is also acutely aware of how the bushfires changed both our views of our natural environment and how our environmental management and disasters are perceived overseas.

The musician, former *Neighbours* guest star, and previous employee of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Victoria was in Sweden when the 2019 bushfires ravaged her beloved home country.

"People were freaking out over here, so it felt like I couldn't really escape it from here either," she says.

"Fire is a really humbling element because you're very powerless to it, even when you're fighting it. You don't really fight fire, you just contain it and try to let it do its thing. So it makes you feel very powerless.

"I started getting this feeling of extraordinary powerlessness... I was just feeling incredibly sad, but then I felt incredibly disappointed in how our government was handling it. I felt incredibly disappointed. Really pissed off. And so it was a

CLOCKWISE: GREEN MUSIC AUSTRALIA; MADS COLVIN

SUPPLIED

CORDIALE CONSERVATION

Lime Cordiale's Oli Leimbach (top) is realistic about the compounding pressures on musicians who are trying to make it and how many demands and competing agendas they're already grappling with.

combination of feeling incredibly sad an feeling incredibly angry."

She channelled this anger and frustration into a song, "My Rugged Home", explaining why she felt music was the answer in a long-distance chat with *Rolling Stone AU/NZ*.

"You sing when simply speaking is not enough. You write a song when simply talking about it is not enough. You're levelling up your thoughts in a way, in a message that hopefully can be conveyed. I think that's why artists [lend their voice to these causes]. I think we're compelled to," she says.

"I think that's what music does – what the arts does – is it helps articulate how we feel."

The Sound of Silence

One issue with speaking out about sustainability, can be people's urge to point out the flaws or inconsistencies in what you are (and aren't) doing. It can be a tricky balance of preaching to your fans, when you are still very much reliant on a broken system to survive.

Despite his environmental activism and deeply held beliefs, Lime Cordiale's Leimbach is also realistic about the compounding pressures on musicians who are trying to make it and how many demands and competing agendas they're already grappling with.

So he acknowledges that sometimes sustainability ends up taking a back seat. To those who have let their focus shift or who may have lost sight of the plight, he says they can always start again with small steps.

"We started off as environmentalists in the way that we grew up on the Northern Beaches [of Sydney] and as ocean lovers. We stopped eating seafood first, actually, because we couldn't believe that we were taking fish out of the ocean, out of their natural habitat."

From there, they did charity shows in their early days for Sea Shepherd and other local organisations in a bid to help protect and raise money for the ocean.

"We sort of realised, 'What the hell are we doing?' We have this voice. And the reason we wanted this voice in the first place was to be role models of some sort and preach what we believed in."

Oli Leimbach, Lime Cordiale

As the band grew though, and there was a need to make money, do more shows, and be everything to everyone, sustainability became harder to prioritise.

"It just felt way too overwhelming," he says. "And then a few years ago, we sort of realised, like, 'What the hell are we doing?' We have this voice. And the reason we wanted this voice in the first place was to be role models of some sort and preach what we believed in.

"So then we came back to this sustainability work that we believed in and it transformed."

This transformation is seen both in Lime Cordiale's professional and personal lives.

Personally, they've become involved in regenerative farming, having purchased a farm just over three years ago.

"It's sequestering carbon. It's been a big learning curve for us, because there's seventy head of cattle up here, and I always thought that cattle were bad for the environment and they trampled the earth, and I thought that maybe we were purchasing something bad. But the local farmers up here introduced us

to regenerative farming and it's all about soil quality. It's all about bringing down the carbon from the atmosphere," Leimbach says.

"So that's been really cool – purchasing this traditionally farmed farm and being able to transform it into something that's a lot healthier. We're seeing the changes every year in terms of even just insects and the quality of the grass and soil."

It is, as mentioned, a tricky balance.

"When we're on the farm, we feel like we're giving back to nature. And then when we're off touring around Europe or America, we're suddenly having this heavy carbon footprint again. So we felt like hypocrites," he concedes.

This fear shouldn't lead to inaction though, he says, because it's better to do something than nothing.

"Transparency is really key. There are all these online warriors that will say, 'Well you guys consider yourselves environmentalists, but how did you get to Melbourne? Did you drive? How did you get to Berlin? Did you sail?' And they just want to rip into you," he says.

"No, obviously we flew to Berlin, but I'm not telling you to not take a holiday... And maybe there is an argument for taking the show to people in a more carbon-friendly way [and spreading the message]...

"People can say whatever they want. As long as we're all trying and working out alternatives, that's what matters. Is it better to just give up and sit at home and not do anything?"

From Little Things, Big Things Grow

Graham has been able to create small actions and bring them into the 'Woodes Universe'.

Every song on her 2023 EP *Kingdom Come* had an accompanying Australian hike which she shared with her audience. Her small team would go there to shoot an organic music video and "kind of just let it unfold however it happened without too much prep or set building or conceptualising," she says.

"It was more about getting out and researching each location and wanting to bring my fans out into the wild with me," she explains.

She also collaborated with Australia's largest gardening club, The Diggers Club, doing an acoustic series of the EP and sending out wildflower seeds to fans who pre-saved the music.

"Being part of something like this, it makes you feel like just by being a fan and by being a part of a community that you're doing good. A big thing that I keep coming back to as an artist is bringing joy and putting something positive out into the world, or just trying to give back this kind of euphoric belief that it can be better. That's what I see as my role as an artist. A lot of the time, that's what pulls me, that's kind of like the North Star. That's what I really value as a fan of music. And I think sustainability is just innately a part of who I've always been," she says.

Berish Bilander, Green Music Australia CEO.

"We make the case that artists need to use their cultural power to talk to audiences and to call for bigger political action because politicians hold the huge economic levers, not artists."

Berish Bilander, Green Music Australia CEO

Green Music Australia CEO Berish Bilander encourages both big and small actions from musicians.

"There's magic in taking action, there's magic in getting cracking and seeing a win on the board," he says of getting started.

Indeed, Green Music Australia's BYO Bottle campaign was picked up by hundreds of local artists, and then went further with the likes of P!nk, Dave Matthews Band, Jack Johnson and venues around the world jumping on board.

"On the flip side, we're really careful to say to artists 'Don't stop there. Don't just think that it's all about the small actions'," he adds.

"One of the most important things you can do is to talk about the climate crisis. Talk about how you're trying to reckon your actions with the significant challenge that we all face. Talk about feelings of hypocrisy. Artists like Radiohead have really eloquently talked about the fact that their touring footprint is quite large and at the same time, they're calling on governments to do more on climate. And there's a level of hypocrisy there, but that doesn't mean that they're gonna stop, because it's impossible for us to be perfect in a society that is so extractive.

"And so we really make the case that artists need to use their cultural power to talk to audiences and to call for bigger political action because politicians hold the huge economic levers, not artists."

There are also a lot of big and small actions taking place behind the scenes when it comes to touring.

A few years ago, musician Kim Churchill and his friend were inspired to build a stage which slides out the side of his campervan. He says it was liberating because it meant he was no longer beholden to venues and would be able to perform in more beautiful outdoor settings. He became frustrated, however, by the difficulties in fully powering this venture via solar and having to rely on fossil fuels and generators for certain aspects of performing.

Enter Alex Pinte

Pinte founded Wildlive, which specialises in developing audio and lighting solutions which are low consumption and powered by renewable energies. He worked with a French startup, Pikip Solar Speakers, which developed a sound system which uses up to ten times less energy than a traditional setup.

He's now doing the same work with the lighting required for touring musicians to create something which is low consumption or completely off-grid.

@RCSTILS

Left and above: Kim Churchill playing Solar Sessions at the Barn on the Ridge in Milton, on the south coast of New South Wales.

Right: Solar Sessions founder Alex Pinte.

Pinte knows he has the solution, but he just needs to prove it to people. So, he launched Solar Sessions, a proof of concept which will show it's possible to do a sustainable, solar-powered music event. Solar Sessions looks at everything from sound tech to staging as well as waste, transport and food, working closely with the venues.

The concept also aims to overcome audience perceptions that they are always being asked to offset their impact, change their behaviour and fix the problem on their own.

"I could see artists asking the crowd to make an effort, you know, 'Bring your own bottle', 'Watch your waste'. And I was like 'We're pushing the crowd, but what are we doing at our end to make things work?' I thought it was too easy to put the problem on the audience. As soon as we put too much pressure on people, there's a bit of a rejection," Pinte says.

"So that's part of my approach. I just want to make it easy and not put pressure on people."

Churchill was part of Solar Sessions' first series of gigs in December 2023 held on the NSW South Coast and says it's an important step in the environmental sustainability of his career.

"It does really feel good to have at least improved as an artist. Being a touring artist is not an incredibly environmentally sustainable way to live, realistically. So, to have improved, it's a nice feeling and helps me sleep at night," he says.

No Music on a Dead Planet

Aside from their moral imperative to act, musicians have also felt the real-world impact of changing climate conditions and extreme weather events.

"They have been directly affected by over forty festival closures in the last three years alone," says Green Music Australia's Bilander. "We're talking about a variety of extreme weather events from flooding to fires and high winds that are knocking out festivals left, right and centre. So they're actually experiencing it in terms of their career."

The reality is, Berish emphasises, there won't be music on a dead planet. There won't be musicians on a dead planet. There won't be – well, anything – on a dead planet, and that's a message and a mission strong enough to bring people together.

"We're looking for a community of artists working in tandem, amplifying each other's voices and that of the broader environmental movement to have substantive changes on issues like plastic pollution, emissions reduction and the government's role in that," he says.

Musicians are the perfect people to deliver this message, according to Edwina Floch, the founder of the Environmental Music Prize.

"The latest Climate Compass data revealed that a majority of Australians are climate alarmed, alert or concerned. Some of us are very active and informed. A lot of us sit in that kind of 'Silent Middle' where we aren't really sure what to do. And so we really are at this tipping point where we need to create a massive cultural response, because we have the science, we have the solution, but we need to just be propelled into action and often it's emotion that makes us take that final step or change our behaviour," she says.

"And so the aim of the Environmental Music Prize is not to have one climate song or one climate anthem or to talk about one particular issue, but to create a whole body of work that resonates from lots of different types of artists, that resonates with lots of different types of people and multiple messages that can meet people where they are in terms of their own personal tastes and background and identity, but also on that emotional spectrum that we have in terms of nature. We have great moments of joy and celebration and connection to nature. And I think increasingly as the ecological crisis continues, we're also going to have moments of doubt and despair and wanting to come together; moments of solitude."

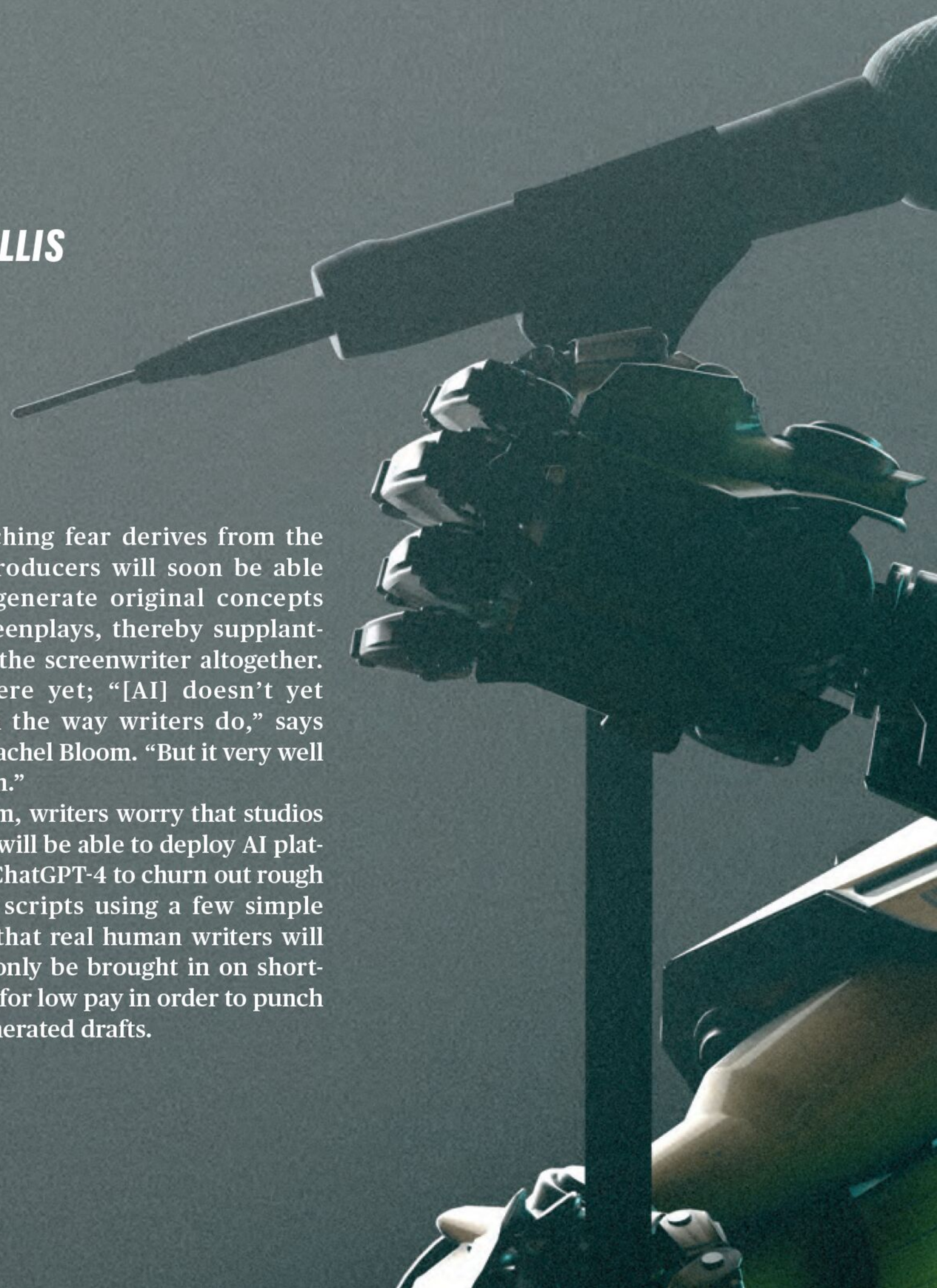
She adds: "We have the science, we have the solutions. For anyone who wants to be informed, there is a wealth of information out there. What's missing is that emotional impetus and to create that deep emotional connection and personal resolve.

"Music plays an absolutely intrinsic role in getting the message out there and creating meaningful action."

NATHAN HUGHES, SUPPLIED

AI AND THE THREAT IT POSES TO HUMAN CREATIVITY

BY **ROLAND ELLIS**



DURING RECENT contract negotiations between the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Hollywood studio and streaming system, one thing became clearer than ever before: widespread fear exists among writers over the threat posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to their craft and livelihoods.

"This is an existential crisis for writers," Jamey Perry, vice chair of the WGA's Disabled Writers Committee, told Reuters. She certainly wasn't alone in this assessment.

The overarching fear derives from the notion that producers will soon be able to use AI to generate original concepts and write screenplays, thereby supplanting the job of the screenwriter altogether. We're not there yet; "[AI] doesn't yet extrapolate in the way writers do," says screenwriter Rachel Bloom. "But it very well could very soon."

In the interim, writers worry that studios and streamers will be able to deploy AI platforms such as ChatGPT-4 to churn out rough first drafts of scripts using a few simple prompts, and that real human writers will consequently only be brought in on short-term contracts for low pay in order to punch up these AI-generated drafts.

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY *ANTHONY CALVERT*

A deal has now been reached between the WGA and the studios, curbing some of the potential uses of AI in the screenwriting process for the time being. Yet AI-fear remains ubiquitous within the screenwriting community and the creative community at large. Actors, novelists, musicians, visual artists, etcetera – one would be hard pressed to argue there is not a fairly widespread sense among creatives that AI could be coming for their jobs in the not too distant future. Or, if not taking jobs wholesale, augmenting them in deeply disruptive and financially perilous ways, at least as far as the artists themselves are concerned. As Fran Drescher put it during the recent Screen Actors Guild strike, "If we don't stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble. We are all going to be in jeopardy of being replaced by machines."

How well founded are these intensifying fears around AI, and when we strip back the hype, are we really in a place where the next Paul Thomas Anderson film could just as easily be written (and perhaps even directed) by a chatbot as by the man himself?

Many in the technology and AI spaces certainly seem to think so. "Hollywood is a canary in a coal mine," said Moran Cerf, Professor of neuroscience and business at New York's Columbia University, in a recent interview with Canada's CBC News. "AI will replace the job of the assembly line worker but it will also replace the job of a creative agent who has to come up with a new ad for the Super Bowl."

Chun Xia, a founding partner of Silicon Valley-based technology investment firm TSVC, believes that TV sitcoms will soon (union deals notwithstanding) be primarily written by AI. As he told the BBC, "AI algorithms will analyse existing scripts, comedic patterns and audience responses to generate content with comedic timing, character dynamics and engaging storylines."

In looking at some of the existing technology, one can see why the likes of Cerf and Xia might feel so confident as to the prospects of creative AI. A tool like ChatGPT-4 can be used to churn out a scripted scene in a matter of seconds. I recently prompted it to write me a diner scene featuring a conversation between fictional TV mobster Tony Soprano and comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Here's just a snippet:

INT. NEW JERSEY DINER — NIGHT

The diner is buzzing with activity and the smell of coffee permeates the air.

JERRY SEINFELD sits at a booth, glancing around, as TONY SOPRANO approaches.

TONY SOPRANO
(to the waitress)
Black coffee, sweetheart. And make it quick.

The waitress nods and heads off. Tony slides into the booth across from Jerry.

JERRY SEINFELD
Tony! How's it going?

TONY SOPRANO
Eh, you know, same old, same old. The family, the business.

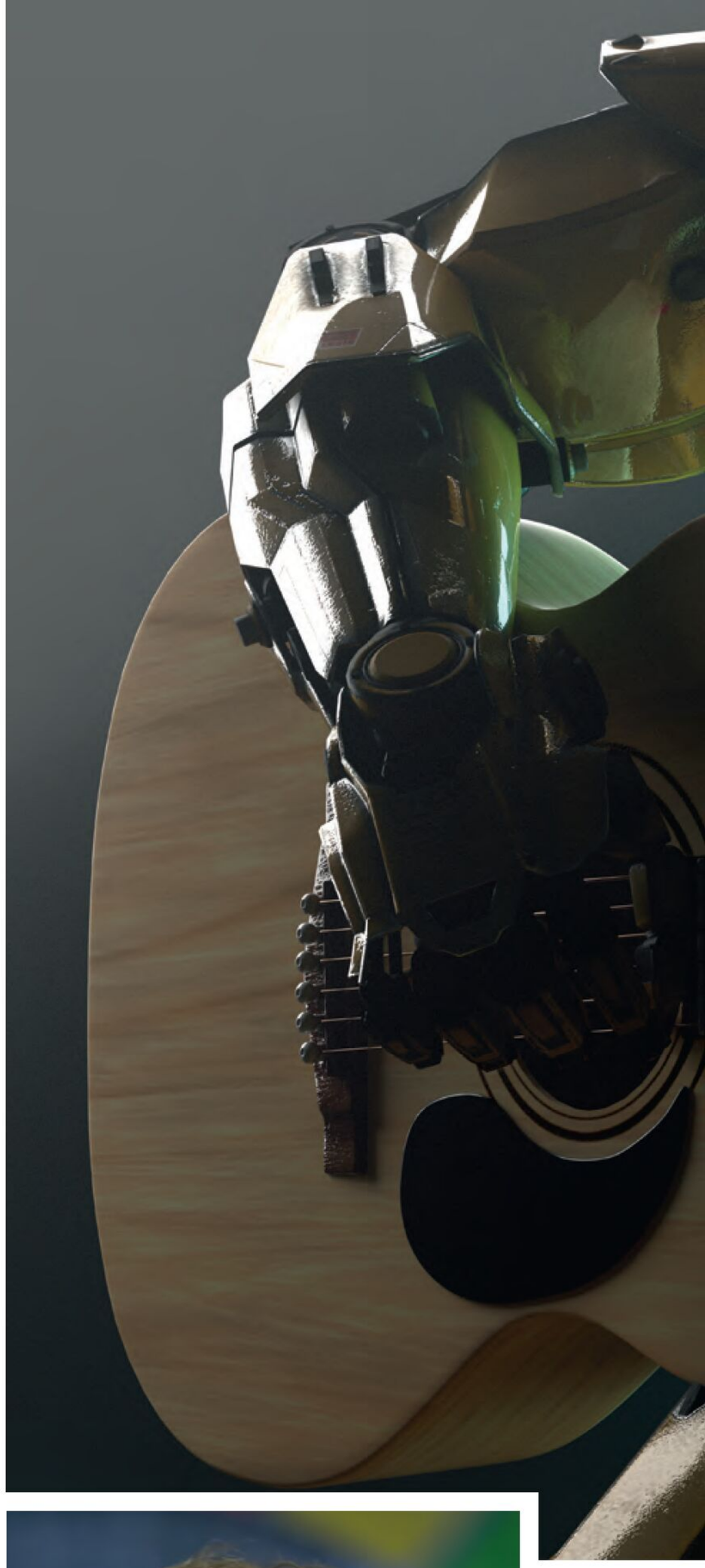
JERRY SEINFELD
The family and the business — sounds like a sitcom.

Tony smirks, nodding appreciatively.

Professor of cinematic arts at USC, Holly Willis, recently ran a similar experiment using GPT. Only in addition to the scene itself, she went further to ask it for a shot list (a breakdown of every camera shot) for her short scene featuring Ken and Barbie. GPT turned one around almost instantly, featuring not only a "montage of fun activities," but also a "fancy flashback sequence."

Some Hollywood producers are so impressed by tools like GPT that they are beginning to transition their operations away from human creatives in favour of AI. As CBS reported in mid-2023, OneDoor studios, led by producer John J. Lee, announced that it will rely on platforms including GPT, Adobe Firefly and Jasper.ai to create a crowdsourced film adaptation of Nova McBee's book series *Calculated*. According to OneDoor, these tools are already busy at work refining script drafts, generating storyboards and other promotional materials for the upcoming projects.

FOR MANY computer scientists and technologists, AI tools like GPT act as yet another indicator that we are heading toward a future of what's widely known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). As technology journalist Kevin Roose said, "You could probably ask a hundred different AI researchers and they would give you a hundred different definitions of what AGI is." But in rankly oversimplified terms, AGI means superhuman machines that surpass us in all areas of cognition, including high-concept reasoning skills and the capacity for originality that one might associate with creativity. Geoffrey Hinton, one of the "Godfathers of deep



Professor Jürgen Schmidhuber, considered by some to be the 'father of AI'.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED
ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY CALVERT; ROBOT CREATED BY STONEMASON, GUITAR BY RICHABRI, LIGHTING BY GHOSTSHIP, VOLUMETRICS BY AFRODITE-OHKI

learning," told *60 Minutes* in 2023 that he is certain we will have AGI in the near future, and that humans will consequently be relegated to the second-smartest entities in the world.

I recently sat down with another revered AGI evangelist to get his take on the coming singularity, and what it's going to mean for human creatives when it arrives.

Professor Jürgen Schmidhuber is both something of an icon and a pariah within the AI research community. In 2016, *The New York Times* published an article under the headline, "When A.I. matures it may call Jürgen Schmidhuber 'Dad'." This paternal reputation stems from his work as a pioneer of generative adversarial networks (now widely used in AI systems), artificial curiosity, transformers with linearised self-attention (transformers are at the root of the ChatGPT, and others), and meta-learning machines that, as Schmidhuber puts it, "learn to learn." He claims that today's most cited neural networks "all build on work done in his labs."

> "Human creativity really is very regular, very compressible stuff."

His critics say that Schmidhuber has played no small role in bestowing the 'father of AI' title upon himself. He has been accused by other prominent AI researchers, including Yann LeCun, a founder of Facebook's original neural networks program, of frequently "claiming credit he doesn't deserve for many, many things." His manic obsession with recognition, said LeCun in an interview with the *Times*, "causes him to systematically stand up at the end of every talk and claim credit for what was just presented, generally not in a justified manner."

Schmidhuber currently spends most of his time at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) on the shores of the Red Sea, where he is still trying to solve the same problem he has been working on since the 1970s. As he describes it, "it's really about trying to build a machine that can learn by itself and become an increasingly general problem solver such that it becomes much smarter than myself, such that I can retire."

Our recent video call freewheeled for a few hours on topics ranging from The Rolling Stones (one of his favourite bands), to self-replicating robot factories on Mars, to the colonisation of the entire cosmos within a few tens of billions of years. Where possible, I tried

to keep him to the subject of AI as it relates to human creativity.

On that, he is certain of the outcome: Human intelligence will soon be matched, rapidly superseded on every level and ultimately made redundant by machines. In other words, the day "when an AI comes out that is able to quickly produce songs comparable to the thousand best songs in the history of humankind" will soon be at hand. At which point, Schmidhuber says, "history as we know it will draw to a close." From then on we will be in the hands of our machine overlords.

What makes this a near foregone conclusion, in Schmidhuber's view, is the fact that human creativity is essentially reducible to a tapestry of predictable patterns. He is dismissive of any notion that there is something inexplicable or lawless about great art, music or literature. For Schmidhuber, what makes a band like The Rolling Stones special is the way they use existing patterns and then build upon them to create exciting new ones. "Maybe suddenly there's a minor chord in there when in the past there was no minor chord," he says. "However it is not a random minor chord there. It is also connected to the rest of the chord structure in a way that is simple. So you have simple ratios between the notes which are participating in the full harmony and the sequence of harmonies, but it's a pattern that is regular, yet different from the previously used patterns."

But if human creativity really is "very regular, very compressible stuff," as Schmidhuber says, then why have AI systems thus far been unable to compress, replicate, and surpass it?

There is of course unprecedented excitement around large language AI models like ChatGPT. Not only can it churn out scripted scenes featuring Jerry Seinfeld and Tony Soprano, it can give seemingly thoughtful and erudite answers to just about any prompt on any subject in a matter of seconds. Still, one would be hard pressed to find a serious computer scientist, neuroscientist, philosopher or author who argues that what GPT does is equivalent to sentience, much less human-level ingenuity. Noam Chomsky has written that "ChatGPT exhibits something like the banality of evil: plagiarism and apathy and obviation." In other words, it offers no novel insights, no original style, but is instead only capable of dully recapitulating the human-generated information that it has ingested at eye-watering scale from across the internet.

Even Schmidhuber has to concede that "GPT is essentially just regurgitating the styles of truly creative artists... it doesn't come up yet with its own, new, unique artistic styles." Despite the current shortcomings of cutting edge AI systems like GPT, however, Schmidhuber refuses to waiver in his belief that Artificial General Intelligence is imminent. "There are already systems capable of doing things like deriving the principles of

FIVE KEY MOMENTS WHERE ROBOTS RESET THE PLAYING FIELD

By James Jennings

1 Fake Drake
"Heart on My Sleeve" may be the biggest hit Drake and the Weeknd had last year, which is a shame since neither of them are actually on it. The AI-generated track by 'Ghostwriter' went viral on TikTok, was mooted for a Grammy nomination (it was deemed ineligible) and created a copyright minefield that has resulted in calls for government reform and streaming service crackdowns.

2 The Beatles find a new song under the couch
When it was announced that The Beatles would be releasing a new song with the assistance of AI, you could practically hear the Boomers snapping their *Revolver* vinyl in disgust. Yet what sounded like sonic sacrilege turned out to simply be AI significantly tidying up an old John Lennon cassette demo titled "Now and Then", making it possible for the Fab Four to release one final song in 2023.

3 Grimes gives her voice away
Canadian singer, songwriter and producer Grimes welcomed AI with open arms by creating an AI version of her voice and giving it away for free on her website Elf.Tech. The result? LA-based Australian artist Kito using the software to create "Cold Touch", a track that Grimes herself dubbed "a masterpiece", with plans now afoot for the pair to collaborate IRL.

Professor Jürgen Schmidhuber is both something of an icon and a pariah within the AI research community.

4 Spotify vs the Bots
Scammers have targeted Spotify, with AI-created songs being listened to by AI bots to boost streaming numbers — a clear problem since streaming companies divide up royalty payments from a limited pool of money, resulting in the artists actually writing songs being deprived of cash that should be going to them.

5 Music for all
Generating AI-created songs is becoming simpler by the day, with Microsoft's generative AI chatbot Copilot now offering a musical plug-in that allows people to turn their ideas into songs, even if they can't play a single note of music. The plug-in can create lyrics, vocals and music via text prompts, such as "write a song about how AI is destroying the music industry in the style of Britney Spears".

arithmetic," and thereby exhibiting human-level reasoning, says Schmidhuber, "it's just not GPT." As for capturing human genius, these systems could still take "months, if not years" to develop, he says. "It will come. We are just in the phase of being scaled up."

Some other AI researchers are far less confident as to the prospects of AGI. On January 17th, 2023, Grady Booch, a Fellow at IBM who has been described (by esteemed neuroscientist Gary Marcus, no less) as "one of the deepest minds on software development in the history of the field," posted the following statement on X [formerly Twitter]:

> AGI WILL NOT HAPPEN IN YOUR LIFETIME
> OR IN THE LIFETIME OF YOUR CHILDREN
> OR IN THE LIFETIME OF YOUR CHILDREN'S
> CHILDREN

As Booch went on to explain to Gary Marcus a few days later, it's not that he thinks AGI will never happen. Or in his own words: "I will assert that the mind is computable and therefore it is conceivable that synthetic minds can be formed, minds that exhibit the behaviour of organic ones." The problem, according to Booch, is that the AI industry is by and large on the wrong track. By which he means that most of the money is pouring into large language models like GPT when it could be much better spent elsewhere.

According to Gary Marcus, the industry is still falling prey to what he calls the "scaling-über-alas" narrative. That is, the notion that exponential increases in computing power – and the concomitant power to ingest and process increasingly vast troves of information – will soon lead to a singularity moment, and then alas, we will have AGI. But what's lacking from this methodology, according to both Booch and Marcus, is any viable sense of cognitive architecture.

We still don't understand how the human mind really does what it does, at least not as far as higher neocortical functions go – abductive reasoning, complex decision making skills and so forth. Until we have a solid grasp on cognitive architecture, according to Booch, artificial minds are essentially being constructed in abstraction from human ones; they are little more than "approximations of intelligence," in Gary Marcus' words. "This is not a problem of scale; this is not a problem of hardware. This is a problem of architecture," says Booch. Most current AIs have little-to-no bearing on human cognitive architecture, leaving the two types of entities essentially incompatible. And Booch doesn't see "anything in the near future of computing that will compress what needs to get AI from where it is today to where it needs to be to form a non-squishy mind."

Marcus is more optimistic about the chances that we will see AGI some time before the end of the century. But like Booch, he thinks that a lot of the focus and money is currently flowing in the wrong direction. "I think a lot of core problems from seventy-five years ago are still unsolved," he says. "[American computer scientist] John McCarthy worried about common sense in 1959, and I still don't see a solution I can take all that seriously."

Another major issue, as both Booch and Marcus see it, is that the field of AI is bursting at the seams with hubristic computer scientists who summarily disregard perspectives from other domains. "We as computer scientists not only vastly overestimate our abilities to create an AGI," says Booch, "We vastly underestimate and underrepresent what behavioural scientists, psychologists, cognitive scientists, neurologists, social scientists, and even the poets, philosophers and storytellers of the world know about what it means to be human."

Perhaps Schmidhuber somewhat proves their point here in summarily declaring that some of the most resonant popular music of the last sixty years is made of "very simple, very compressible stuff." Before going on to try to explain songwriting and musical dynamics in startlingly simplistic terms, all while never having composed a single recognisable song of his own.

SO HOW close are tools like ChatGPT to putting the artists out of work? As a critic opining from the sidelines, perhaps the only viable metric we have to go on here are the tools themselves. In other words, how good are they *really* at writing?

In briefly trying to answer this question, let's consider my Soprano/Seinfeld scene. "So, Seinfeld, what's the deal with your obsession with cereal? I hear you've got a whole cabinet dedicated to it," says Tony at one point. To which Jerry responds: "Cereal is the breakfast of champions, Tony. It's simple, no-nonsense. Like a good mob operation." It's all like this, basically; which is to say the scene is hollow and contrived from start to finish. On top of the fact that it has zero in the way of stakes or conflict, at no point do the characters have any sort of motivation, perspective, moral compass or intelligence. They interact with one another to a point, which puts them at a slight remove from, say, a Buzz Lightyear doll – push his button and he delivers one of his most iconic catchphrases from a randomised carousel. But it's not much of a remove.

In this light, does it feel like our cold AI tools are getting warmer to you? ®

CONFESSIONS, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, AND THE HUNT FOR TUPAC'S KILLER

Why did it take decades to charge anyone in the shocking murder of the rap superstar?

By JOHN L. SMITH

AS

HE TOOK his sunrise walk through a quiet Las Vegas suburb of tan stucco houses and desert landscaping in late September, Duane Davis resembled nobody's idea of a gangster legend. A bald man on the soft side of sixty in a white Polo Sport T-shirt and loose-fitting pants, he could have been just another middle-aged neighbour plodding uphill against the ravages of time.

Whatever reverie Davis enjoyed ended as officers from Las Vegas Metro's Criminal Apprehension Team swiftly approached in tactical gear out of unmarked vehicles. "Hey, Keffe, Metro Police," one cop said. "Come on over here. I appreciate your cooperation, though."

Armed only with a cellphone and water bottle, Davis was the picture of compliance. He'd expected this since July, when police served a search warrant at his home seeking evidence in the 1996 murder of rap superstar Tupac Shakur. With a long criminal history, Davis knew the drill. He wondered aloud why the police hadn't brought the media with them, and even managed to quip with his captors after his hands and feet were shackled. When a cop offered to assist him into the vehicle, he declined, assuring the police, "I'm a pro."

That he is. But somehow, Duane Keith "Keffe D" Davis – major drug dealer, penitentiary veteran, and longtime South Side Compton Crips street-gang leader – has managed to talk his way into the biggest trouble of his felony-littered life.

After Davis was transferred into the back seat of a black-and-white, his uniformed police escort asked, "So what they got you for, man?"

"Oh, man," Davis replied. "The biggest case in Las Vegas history... September 7, 1996."

"Sure took 'em a while, huh?" the cop said.

"I ain't worried about it," Davis mumbled, and the officer replied, "That's what court's for, right?"

Now facing a murder charge with a gang enhancement, the self-described and self-styled "Compton street legend" is preparing for a Las Vegas trial scheduled for June 3rd. Delays are anticipated as two court-appointed special public defenders pore over reams of discovery and attempt to pry open metaphorically cobwebbed files in a crime that has generated multiple theories, a plethora of potential suspects, and a maze of conspiracy theories. The September 28th indictment describes Davis as the murder's shot caller, and the person responsible for providing the weapon – a .40-calibre Glock – used in the Las Vegas shooting that killed Tupac and wounded Death Row Records godfather Marion "Suge" Knight.

At a press conference at Metro headquarters hours after Davis' arrest, homicide Lt. Jason Johansson cop-splained, "It wasn't until 2018 that this case was reinvigorated as additional information came to light related to this homicide, specifically Duane Davis' own admissions to his involvement in this homicide investigation that he provided to numerous media outlets." In nearly three decades, Las Vegas homicide detectives had amassed plenty of information describing Davis as the leader of the criminal conspiracy, but, Johansson said, "we never had the necessary evidence to bring this case forward."

However, the charges against Davis appear more self-inflicted than the product of dogged detective work. After years of investigative inertia, the information Las Vegas police compiled arrived all but gift-wrapped. Davis gave interviews for shows and documentaries, and even published a 2019 memoir that contains potentially incriminating excerpts placed before the Clark County grand jury. He acknowledges the existence of a 2009 federal agreement he signed in a narcotics investigation in L.A., in which he admitted his role in the Tupac shooting. His cooperation helped earn him a pass in the narcotics case, and the Tupac information couldn't be used against him – as long as he kept his mouth shut. (Through his lawyers, Davis declined to speak for this article.)

After former Los Angeles detectives wrote their own tell-all books – including one that revealed details of the agreement (known as a proffer agreement) – and appeared in documentaries, Davis made admissions in print and on-camera that could bury him in court. In the end, this was no case for Columbo.

Tupac's sister, Sekyiwa Shakur, expressed relief and reticence in a statement, acknowledging the indictment as a "pivotal moment," but added that the "silence of the past twenty-seven years surrounding this case has spoken loudly in our community. His life and death matters and should not go unsolved or unrecognised, so, yes, today is a victory, but I will reserve judgement until all the facts and legal proceedings are complete."

"We have been through decades of pain. They have known about this guy, who been running his mouth for years," Tupac's stepbrother, Mopreme Shakur, told CNN. "So why now?"

Investigators generally agree that retaliation was the prime motive for the fatal shooting, and that Davis' nephew, Orlando "Baby Lane" Anderson, was the triggerman, firing from the back seat of a white Cadillac as it pulled alongside the black 750 BMW Knight drove with Tupac inside at the intersection of Flamingo Road and Koval Lane. Tupac, Knight, and members of their entourage had beaten up Anderson earlier that night – following a boxing match at the MGM Grand – in a crime captured on a hotel surveillance camera. Anderson and his allies exacted payback, with Davis allegedly directing them and providing the murder weapon. In one of many chest-thumping lines from Davis' memoir, he writes, "We couldn't let no record company studio gangsters do us like that. Had they lost their fuckin' rappin' ass minds?"

But there are deeper intrigues to consider. Police – and even Davis – have long contended the killing of Tupac and the 1997 murder of Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." Wallace were part of a violent East Coast-West Coast hip-hop rivalry. The feud's focal points were Knight's Death Row Records on the West Coast, and Bad Boy Records and its CEO Sean Combs on the East. Add to that gang involvement and the stench of police malfeasance wafting through Knight's insider connections to the LAPD, and there are dark alleys in all directions. (Reps for Combs and Knight did not reply to requests for comment.)

With the indictment generating global news and tabloid fodder, family members aren't alone in wondering "Why now?". The story of the long-stalled case appears to include not just warring gangs and treacherous hip-hop bosses, but also sparring law-enforcement agencies. The lack of closure in the murder of such a troubled but undeniably talented victim has encouraged conspiracies to grow like weeds from the asphalt.

One of the biggest murders in Las Vegas history might also be the most tangled investigation. Did the LAPD and Las Vegas police collaborate on solving the murder or try to stymie each other? Did two cops from different departments almost come to blows over a possible murder weapon? Did certain members of Vegas police not want to solve it in the first place? Why weren't follow-ups done with key players connected to the murder? When exactly did Las Vegas police learn about that crucial agreement Davis made with law enforcement? Did egos get in the way of law enforcement? Interviews with cops, reporters, lawyers, and Davis' own account of events suggest all that and a lot more.

With detectives from two of the nation's largest police departments and agents dispatched to a federal task force in 2006 investigating the sensational hip-hop murder cases of Tupac and Biggie Smalls, Tupac's family, fans, and foes alike continue to wonder what took so long to get an indictment. If pointed fingers were loaded pistols, a lot of people would be running for cover.

BY HIS OWN telling, Davis doesn't fit the stereotype of a gangster. He had two parents, a roof over his head, and food on the table. As a kid, he didn't play with pistols, but Pop Warner football – coincidentally, on a team with Knight. Davis' father served in the Marines and moved his family to California. His mother kept

MICHAEL CAULFIELD/AP IMAGES

Compton Police hold up a Death Row necklace found during a raid. Several gang murders occurred following Tupac's death.

"WE COULDN'T LET NO RECORD COMPANY STUDIO GANGSTERS DO US LIKE THAT. HAD THEY LOST THEIR FUCKIN' RAPPIN' ASS MINDS?"

busy with the children, eventually a dozen in all. The young Davis family settled in the South Los Angeles neighbourhood of Watts, where Davis was born. As he recalls it, after the 1965 Watts Riots, his dad used $50,000 won at Tijuana's Agua Caliente Racetrack to move the family up to Compton, three miles and half a world away. He candidly admits that the decision to go gangster was his alone. "Compton was where my parents chose to raise their family," he wrote in his memoir. "But the street life, that decision was all mine."

Davis started dealing weed as a teenager before graduating to powder and crack cocaine, whose profits would fuel gang violence and ravage the neighbourhood he grew up in. At least two brothers joined in. By 1990, his older brother and "best friend" Michael joined him in the gangster life and was shot and killed in Compton. Keffe D lived large and developed interstate operations with trafficking connections linked to the Cali Cartel. At the height of his game, he claims, he was moving hundreds of kilos of cocaine a month. But he also paid a heavy price, beginning in the mid-Eighties with multi-year stretches in state and federal prisons. In his memoir, he brags about shooting up a neighbourhood, operating crack houses, and battering women. How accurate a narrator Davis might be is up for debate, but of such things, Compton street legends are made.

Despite giving conflicting accounts of his role in the Tupac murder – he denied his involvement in the shooting for a decade – Davis is confident in his own self-image. Bragging Godfather-style in his memoir, he writes, "In my South Side Crip neighbourhood, I was known by several names; Big Dawg, Big Homey, some called me Gotti, but most knew me as Keffe D. In terms of rank, if we were an Army, I was a five-star general. If we were a city, I was the mayor. If we were a country, I was President Obama." If he lost family members and those under his command from time to time, that was the cost of doing business.

Although Davis risked his freedom discussing his role in the murder publicly, he appears to have believed that he was in the clear, susceptible only to the shaky aim of old enemies, the rhetorical stones of reporters, and the chiding of retired cops hyping their own memoirs. One was Greg Kading, a retired LAPD detective who left in 2010 after watching a lengthy task-force investigation into the murders of Tupac and Biggie falter, he believed, due to the politics inside the department. Kading's 2011 memoir, *Murder Rap: The Untold Story of the Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur Murder Investigations*, includes information gleaned from the 2009 federal proffer Davis signed.

The book, in which Kading calls Davis "a legend in his own mind," also claims Keffe D is an admitted liar and blowhard whose credibility is suspect. In a quote that's sure to have defence attorneys in the Davis case taking notes, Kading writes: "We were well-aware of the informant's shortcomings as a credible witness in any legal proceeding. No court in the country was going to accept the word of Duane Keith 'Keffe D' Davis, a convicted felon and a confessed liar. As to whether we believed what Keffe D was telling us, with certain reservations I'd have to say that we did."

Commonly known as a "queen-for-a-day agreement," a proffer is a written statement between a prosecutor and a defendant that allows the defendant to give truthful information about an alleged crime without the government using the information obtained against him. At the time of his proffer – orchestrated by Kading and his partners – Davis was facing a minimum mandatory sentence of twenty-five years in a federal investigation of his interstate narcotics operation. The offer to Davis was straightforward: He agreed to speak truthfully about a range of crimes, beginning with the drug investigation, but also what he knew about the murders of Tupac and Biggie. And he knew plenty.

In his memoir, he says he agreed to the proffer to save not only himself, but also family members and his crew. He answered questions about his drug activity, his relationships with feuding hip-hop record company bosses Knight and Combs, and his knowledge of the murders of Biggie and Tupac. Law enforcement couldn't use the proffer itself against Davis, but it didn't protect him from incriminating himself if he spoke out publicly.

Admissible as evidence only in the court of public opinion, Kading's book failed to make waves with the Las Vegas homicide detectives who had jurisdiction in the Tupac investigation, some of whom subsequently claimed they were not aware of the proffer agreement. But Kading kept busy, collaborating on a book-based 2015 documentary, *Murder Rap: Inside the Biggie and Tupac Murders*, with filmmaker Mike Dorsey that included excerpts of the detective's recording of Davis around the time of the proffer agreement. "We'll wipe they ass out quick," Davis brags in the film, referring to the shooting. Believing no one outside the room would ever hear his conversation, Davis shows zero compunction about the attempt to take out Tupac and Knight for what he believed would be a $1 million payoff

from Death Row's competition, Bad Boy Records CEO Combs. (A rep for Combs did not reply to a request for comment, but Combs has previously vehemently denied the allegation.)

Las Vegas law enforcement initially responded with silence to the documentary. Was it the message, or perhaps the messenger, that bothered them? Former Las Vegas journalist and true-crime author Cathy Scott has followed the Tupac case since the shots were fired, and suspects it's a little of both. "Kading is all about publicity and taking credit for things, but the problem for Kading was he's no longer a police officer and hasn't been for years," Scott says. "He was trying to get either the LAPD or Metro to sign on with him to get [the investigation] done. He went to Vegas to talk to Metro. He called me at the time and asked for advice. He was all hyped up, and had also reached out to the DA's offices in both L.A. and Vegas."

By 2018, the Dorsey-Kading collaboration re-emerged as the ten-episode *Unsolved: The Murders of Tupac and the Notorious B.I.G.*, starring Josh Duhamel as Kading. Davis, who by then had survived colon cancer and life in a racket with a prison-or-death retirement plan, stopped exercising his right to remain silent while others profited from his proffer. He apparently forgot that he was the one with something to lose by going public. After learning that Davis agreed to sit for multiple interviews with an attorney present during the production of the BET series *Death Row Chronicles*, Kading and Dorsey could barely believe their ears.

"He has to know that he can't talk about this case the way he did in his proffer deal," Dorsey recalls saying to Kading. "He's not protected outside of that one day that he went in and did his proffer. If he went on CNN and told that same story [the next day]... it could have been used against him. I think Keffe saw all this attention on his story and wanted to be the one to tell it."

IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, Kading and Dorsey signed on as consultants for *Death Row Chronicles*, whose producers managed to get Davis to sit for two studio interviews. Seated at a desk in an empty office fifty feet from the studio, Dorsey listened by headset and texted follow-up questions to the producer as Davis treaded carefully through the questioning.

The plan was nearly exposed when Davis was escorted down a hall that passed Dorsey's listening post and briefly stared at him through a window as he went by. "He looked in the office and locked eyes on me," says Dorsey, who by then had gone public about his own opinion of Davis' culpability.

Arriving in shorts and a T-shirt, Davis initially baulked at sitting down without his suit on, but eventually relented. "He was very cagey in the interviews. He was careful about how he worded his answers, and had a lawyer present with him in the studio," Dorsey says. When the series was being aired, Dorsey contacted Metro's homicide bureau and suggested the officers watch the Davis interview on *Death Row Chronicles*, which premiered in February 2018, a week before *Unsolved*. The profile of Davis was about to get much bigger. Dorsey says he reached out to Metro's homicide bureau with a simple goal: "I made it my mission to get the detectives to reopen the case, which they did."

At the time, Davis was in the process of digging his hole deeper with his memoir, *Compton Street Legend: Notorious Keffe D's Street-Level Accounts of Tupac and Biggie Murders, Death Row Origins, Suge Knight, Puffy Combs, and Crooked Cops*. Co-authored with Yusuf Jah, the 225-page paperback is a readable and remorseless advertisement for Davis' life as a drug dealer. He admits providing the proffer and substantial cooperation in exchange for a pass on a federal narcotics case. He acknowledges he was riding in the white Cadillac at the time of the shooting, and passed the murder weapon into the back seat – all of which can be used against him, prosecutors argue. Davis' message to readers on the back of the book won't help his case: "The last living eyewitness to Tupac's murder is telling his story."

Compton Street Legend was published twenty-three years after the shooting, and not long after *Death Row Chronicles* and *Unsolved* brought the case back before the public. Those who had watched the homicide case languish for so long remained sceptical. As the months passed, Las Vegas detectives kept a low profile on the status of their investigation.

Perhaps emboldened by police silence, Davis became more comfortable in front of the camera as he pushed his memoir, appearing in YouTube interviews on popular hip-hop channels such as The Art of Dialogue and VladTV. He at times expressed regret that the shooting had taken place, but didn't deny having an insider's knowledge of the details. "When nothing happened to him, I think he thought, 'I guess it's safe. I guess they're not going to do anything as long as I'm being careful how I word it,' " Dorsey says.

"DJ Vlad" Lyubovny is among those sceptical of the timing of Davis' indictment after he spent so many years hiding in plain sight. "The information has been out there," Lyubovny says. "It's not like they have to have [a lot] to corroborate what Keffe D is saying. I mean, Keffe could always say, 'Hey, I made all this up because I was facing a life sentence, and then I made up more of it because I was being paid to do the interviews. I saw it as a stream of income.' "

ON JULY 17TH, 2023, with a heat warning in effect and temperatures in the Las Vegas valley expected to exceed forty-four degrees Celcius all week, Las Vegas police and a SWAT unit converged on the Henderson home Davis shares with his wife, Paula Clemons. According to grand jury testimony, police recovered a cellphone, laptops, documents, two tubs of photographs, a copy of *Vibe* featuring Tupac, a copy of the Kading book, and news clippings about the murder, including some contained in a small clothbound photo album dating back to 1996. Police also recovered a copy of a 1998 search warrant and a room receipt from the former Monte Carlo Hotel and Casino, where, authorities say, a Davis associate stayed at the time of the shooting. In addition, they found .40-calibre cartridges of the general type used in the fatal shooting, which Metro sources said would be compared to the slugs that killed Tupac.

Around seven weeks later, the Metro police came calling as Davis ambled down the sidewalk. There's the rub for Keffe D. After nearly three decades, he's the last man standing in one of the biggest unsolved murder cases in hip-hop history.

Beyond the lack of a murder weapon and getaway car, the suspected shooter and two other accomplices have already been lost to the hard grind of gangster life. Orlando Anderson has most often been identified as the suspected triggerman. Firing from the back seat of the rented white Cadillac, he reportedly aimed at targets in a parked BMW just a few feet away. The indictment also names Deandrae "Big Dre" Smith as another passenger and possible killer. But under Nevada law, you don't have to pull the trigger to pay the price. Active participants in a premeditated homicide can also be charged with first-degree murder. In legalese, that leaves little wiggle room for Davis, who is accused of "aiding and abetting in the commission of this crime, with the intent that this crime be committed, by counselling, encouraging, hiring, commanding, inducing and/or otherwise procuring the other to commit the crime."

Returning to California hours after the shooting, Anderson reportedly wasted little time dropping hints to his fellow Crips about his alleged role in the Tupac hit. Anderson was already a suspect in at least one other murder that year. Hauled in for questioning by police in the Tupac case, he was never charged. On May 29th, 1998, Anderson was killed in a gang shootout at a Compton car wash.

It wasn't the bullets, but the burgers that took out Big Dre Smith, who, a friend said in grand jury testimony, was six feet six and weighed close to 400 pounds. The trusted Crip who might have pulled the trigger on Tupac died in 2004 from complications related to obesity. The Cadillac's wheelman, Terry "Bubble Up" Brown, was shot to death in 2015, with his body discovered inside a Compton marijuana dispensary.

But years before, Smith and Brown were in Vegas with Davis, who admits he was among the nearly 10,000 people in attendance at the heavyweight fight at the MGM Grand Garden

Duane "Keffe D" Davis in court in October 2023. Released on bail in early January, his trial is scheduled to start in June.

JOHN LOCHER/GETTY IMAGES

"SO WHAT THEY GOT YOU FOR, MAN?" ASKED THE COP.

"THE BIGGEST CASE IN LAS VEGAS HISTORY," DAVIS REPLIED.

"I AIN'T WORRIED ABOUT IT."

Arena that saw Mike Tyson flatten World Boxing Association titleholder Bruce Seldon in the first round. Seated near ringside in a $3,000 blue pinstripe suit and gold tie, Davis would have been easy to spot.

The main event was a bust, but the violence in Vegas had just begun, first with the beating of Anderson inside the MGM Grand by Tupac, Knight, and members of their entourage. Prosecutors alleged in the grand jury proceedings that the fight, purportedly payback for the theft of a Death Row gold chain a few weeks earlier during a Crips and Mob Piru melee in California, precipitated the drive-by shooting that came hours later.

Metro bicycle cops, supervised that night by Sgt. Chris Carroll, patrolled the traffic-clogged Strip and sidewalks bustling with boisterous party animals. One veteran officer describes the policing strategy not in traditional law enforcement terms, but as just "trying to keep a lid on things" in the hope that nothing heavy goes down.

That hope faded at approximately 11:15pm, when Carroll received a 'shots fired' call from two bicycle officers positioned on an upper floor of a parking garage near the attack. The officers didn't witness the shooting. From their surveillance vantage point, they could see a line of cars pull away and proceed west toward what they later learned was Knight's mobbed-up Club 662, where Tupac and Tyson were scheduled to make an appearance that evening.

In a moment that provides an easy metaphor for the much-criticised investigation to come, Carroll's cohorts initially gave chase on two wheels after seeing a Black BMW peel away from the procession, catching up to it in traffic near Las Vegas Boulevard and Harmon Avenue. Carroll reached the vehicle – two of its tires flattened after hitting a concrete curb – at a nearby intersection. Drawing his weapon, Carroll ordered the two occupants out of the car. Only the hulking driver complied. The cop was no hip-hop fan, but he recognized an agitated Knight. Carroll repeatedly ordered Knight to stay back as he attempted to check the status of the passenger, slumped in his seat behind a bullet-pocked door. After prying open the damaged door, Carroll recalls easing the body of a badly bleeding and barely conscious twenty-five year old man to the pavement. From somewhere behind him he heard a frantic Knight shouting, "Pac! Pac! Pac!"

Only then did it dawn on the cop that the man bleeding from multiple chest wounds, his nostrils, and mouth was Tupac Shakur.

"He was still breathing, but in very bad shape," Carroll recalls. "I spoke to him. Most homicide victims know their killer. I asked who shot him."

The rapper known for his lyrical elegance offered a terse response: "Fuck you," he told Carroll before sagging into unconsciousness.

Approximately four minutes later, Carroll recalls, paramedics arrived and intubated the dying man. Knight was also taken to the hospital. As ambulances made their way through clogged streets toward University Medical Center, Davis says in his memoir, they passed four men – Davis, Anderson, Smith, and Brown – waiting to cross Las Vegas Boulevard. As sirens blared and chaos ensued, the quartet gazed at the vehicles racing to the hospital. "There we were, looking right into the ambulances transporting Tupac and Suge," Davis recalls in his memoir. "The moral of the story, real Gangsters are nothing to fuck with!"

Hit four times, including twice in the chest, Tupac stayed alive for six days before he was declared dead on September 13th, 1996. Knight recovered from a messy but minor flesh wound. He had much bigger headaches coming his way.

When news of the shooting reached California a few days later, the South Side Compton Crips and Mob Piru and their Bloods allies went to the mattresses in a South Central shooting war. Several drive-by shootings and three murders followed in the next ten days, and bodies dropped for months afterward. When East Coast rapper Biggie Smalls died in a still-unsolved drive-by shooting on March 9th, 1997, in Los Angeles, police sources surmised it was a West Coast retaliation for the Tupac killing.

Tupac's defiant epithet would come to define the Las Vegas detectives' frustration as they attempted to get material witnesses to cooperate. Knight was no help, and years later, journalist Randall Sullivan would claim in his book that Knight used his legal connections to avoid sitting

for an interview in the aftermath of the shooting. Knight's refrain with the cops was consistent. One officer recalled, "He heard something, but saw nothing." (An attorney for Knight did not reply to a request for comment.)

THE EARLY INVESTIGATION took another blow in November 1996, when one of the few eyewitnesses willing to cooperate with Vegas detectives – Tupac backup-group member Yafeu Fula – was shot to death in an Orange, New Jersey, housing project. "It just kind of adds to our frustration of this whole investigation," Metro homicide's Sgt. Kevin Manning told the *Los Angeles Times*. (Subpoenaed in the Davis case, Manning declined an interview request for this article.)

Further, Metro detectives found few potential witnesses willing to speak to police. Those who were not at the crime scene had plenty to say about gang violence, the shame of the Tupac shooting, and the tragic loss of a gifted, creative talent. But those who were present mostly kept their mouths shut. Despite a ten-car entourage idling near the shooting scene, "all of the people seem to be looking somewhere else and didn't see much," wisecracked Metro veteran Phil Roland at the time.

Suspicions between the Las Vegas and Los Angeles police departments didn't help. During the six days Tupac lingered on life support, off-duty cops employed as Death Row security remained at the Las Vegas hospital, Sullivan claims in his book, thwarting Metro homicide detectives' attempts to locate witnesses willing to cooperate. Key suspects returned to California, and some of the Compton and Los Angeles cops were working for Knight, according to Sullivan. Metro detectives soon started hearing the name of a suspected triggerman: Orlando Anderson.

Critics chided Las Vegas police for being sloppy and slow, questioning everything from their racial sensitivity to their efforts to preserve the crime scene. As time went on, observers wondered if Metro lost focus on the investigation at a time when, as one street cop from the era tells *Rolling Stone*, "it seemed like there was a house party rapper getting shot every week in those days." To some in uniform, Tupac paid the price for embracing Death Row's gangster ethos.

The first reporter at the shooting scene remains a critic of Metro's early efforts in the case. Former *Las Vegas Sun* reporter Cathy Scott covered the breaking news, the immediate aftermath, and wrote a true-crime paperback on the anniversary of the shooting. *The Killing of Tupac Shakur* explores early conspiracy theories about Tupac's death and includes a photo from the autopsy that some disbelieving fans tore from its pages. (One easily debunked theory painted Carroll as an accomplice to the killing, claiming that he hauled away a breathing Tupac. "Didn't they realise that I was riding a bicycle that night?" Carroll asks.)

Less than a year after the legal circus surrounding the O.J. Simpson murder trial in Los Angeles, a Metro captain told Scott that "a big trial would be bad for tourism." "I always got the feeling they just didn't want to solve it," Scott says. "Maybe they hoped it would go away."

Scott feels it "seemed off" the way detectives blamed Tupac's entourage and Knight for not talking to police, and because of that, they said, they were getting nowhere with the case.

"Every detective I spoke with said the same thing," Scott adds. "So, I asked a captain why it appeared the police weren't eager to solve the case. At the time, the PR machine was in the midst of trying to turn Vegas into a family and kid-friendly destination. The captain said it would be bad for tourism to have gangbangers coming into Vegas for a big murder trial. I said, 'You're kidding.' He said, 'No, it's from the top.'"

"I ALWAYS GOT THE FEELING THEY JUST DIDN'T WANT TO SOLVE IT. MAYBE THEY HOPED IT WOULD GO AWAY."

It wasn't the only allegation of reluctance to solve one of the biggest murders in hip-hop history. During the LAPD investigation of the drive-by killing of Biggie Smalls – which law enforcement considered an act of retaliation following the Tupac murder – Detectives Russell Poole and Fred Miller travelled to Las Vegas to confer about the status of the Tupac case and get a look at the evidence. Following Metro's protocol, evidence boxes marked "Shakur" would have been moved by technicians from a secured warehouse into an examination room, where the detectives would enter only after showing identification and signing in. The examination takes place with handlers wearing gloves and evidence personnel present.

Poole recalled to Sullivan seeing "this whole cabinet of clues that they had just sort of filed away and weren't really following up on." Could ostensible minor details have cracked the case wide open? "We all talked about what a defence lawyer would do with all the contradictory evidence that had come in," Poole said in Sullivan's 2003 book, *LAbyrinth* (based on some of his earlier *Rolling Stone* reporting on the case.) "But then the Vegas guys told us the main reason they would never solve this case was that the politicians didn't want them to. They said the powers that be had let them know the city didn't need an O.J.-style circus. I was shocked, but my partner was yukking it up with them, and saying he feels the same way about the Smalls case." Poole recalled one police officer saying, "These are just gangbangers with money." Metro homicide detective Brent Becker would later scoff at Poole's assessment. Poole retired in frustration in 1999 with his theories of the case taking flak. He died of a heart attack in 2015.

Metro had its own lamentable history of controversial officer-involved shootings that would eventually lead to a Department of Justice review, but proud former cops like ex-homicide detective Phil Ramos are quick to defend the Las Vegas department against accusations its detectives dumped the Tupac case. Without eyewitness cooperation, key suspects in California, and no murder weapon or getaway car, there could be no easy solutions. "We knew who the shooter was," Ramos says. "It was Orlando Anderson, and Orlando was dead. The consensus was, nobody's going to be charged with Tupac's murder because the shooter's dead."

Kading defends much of the Las Vegas effort. "The idea that Vegas didn't want to solve this because it was high-profile defies logic," he says. "Because if you don't solve it, the message you're sending to the criminal community and the public is that we don't care if gang members come here and shoot people and kill them. And we don't do anything about it if they do. So that actually works against the idea that it's bad for tourism."

IF THE FALLOUT FROM the Tupac murder case is a story of gangs in conflict, it at times has included warring police departments. From the start, Metro has been criticised for failing to bring suspects to justice, while the LAPD's secrecy and lack of information sharing is also in question. One Las Vegas homicide veteran recalls Detective Dan Long nearly coming to blows with an LAPD counterpart over the processing and custody of the possible murder weapon, with the California cops believing the detectives in Las Vegas were holding out on them. After LAPD told Long they had the murder weapon, he travelled to L.A. to take custody of it, but was told he was being tested to determine whether Metro had been hiding it. Neither the murder weapon nor the getaway car were ever recovered. (Kading claims that the LAPD willingly turned over a possible murder weapon to Metro around 2007, and that the incident with Long occurred in 2009, when he went to Vegas to arrest Davis, which he was unable to do due to the proffer agreement. He also

says claims of physical fighting are "overexaggerated." A subpoenaed witness in the Davis case, Long declined interview requests for this article.)

Davis participated in the proffer agreement with law enforcement, but if you're wondering whether or not Las Vegas Metro knew about it, you're not alone. Kading writes in his book that Vegas police were cut out of the loop with the approval of LAPD chief legal counsel Gerald Chaleff and Chief Bill Bratton. "We were not obliged to notify the LVMPD of our findings," Kading writes, "thus freeing us to pursue the broader conspiracy case without jeopardising our prized informant." (Bratton did not reply to a request for comment; attempts to reach Chaleff were unsuccessful.) When the hip-hop-war task force folded in 2010 without bringing indictments in the Tupac and Biggie murders, or the greater conspiracy case involving rival record companies, street gangs, and millionaire drug dealers, Kading says he felt ethically comfortable in taking a recording of the Davis interview with him when he retired to write his memoir.

Whatever Metro's legitimate complaints were, as Kading sees it, there's essentially no Davis indictment without the proffer and all that followed. "We're an agency who took it upon ourselves to investigate a murder that they would perceive as being their jurisdiction. So I get where they feel a little bit disregarded," Kading tells *Rolling Stone*. "But there is no prosecution of Duane Davis had we not done the things that we did. The drug investigation led to the proffer. The proffer led to a confession. The confession led to a public outing of Keffe D. And that compelled him to speak for himself, which is ultimately how we got to today's indictment and prosecution."

The prosecution argues that Davis has written and talked his way into the charges he faces. But will it be enough? With no murder weapon and no trace of the getaway car, the 2023 presentment before the Clark County, Nevada grand jury was missing traditional physical evidence. Instead, it included dozens of video excerpts and articles, along with the testimony of Denvonta Lee, a former Crips associate, who testified about what his former roommate – the now-deceased "Big Dre" Smith – supposedly revealed about the shooting. Namely, that Smith and not Anderson was the actual triggerman that night in retaliation for the beatdown at the MGM. "That's exactly what Dre told me, that he did the shooting," Lee said. In this version, it seems Smith was smart enough to let Anderson take the credit for killing a superstar.

What remains unclear is when Las Vegas police learned of the proffer's existence and substance. Grand jury testimony in Davis' case last September raised questions of a lack of communication between the two police departments that legal experts say could put the case in jeopardy. Now retired, Clifford Mogg was the latest in the line of lead detectives in the Tupac case when he joined in 2018. He testified before the grand jury that he still had not received a copy of the recording or transcript of the Davis proffer. (Mogg declined an interview request for this article.) But given the revelations contained in Kading's 2011 book and the 2015 Dorsey documentary, how could the leader of the investigation not know about the existence of the Davis proffer agreement before 2018?

Kading tells *Rolling Stone* that the proffer was initially kept from Las Vegas police out of a need to protect their witness, Davis, but that Metro was later informed. When that case folded, Kading took the material with him and used it as part of his book Murder Rap. "Normal procedure would be for us to turn over the results of our investigation to [Las Vegas police] – except that there was nothing normal about this case," Kading wrote in his book. "We were apprehensive that the Las Vegas investigators would insist on conducting their own interviews... We couldn't let that happen."

After the grand-jury proceeding, Kading tells *Rolling Stone*, he made sure Mogg received copies of the Davis proffer-session recording, explaining, "I don't know if he had it at the time, but he certainly has it now because I gave it to him."

The only parts of the proffer that Mogg claims he knew about had been posted on the internet "in small snippets," as the prosecutor put it. Although prosecutors read from the Davis memoir during the grand jury, and Mogg endorsed the conclusion of Poole and others that the murders of Tupac and Biggie were related, he said in his testimony he hadn't read Kading's book.

A forty-year law enforcement veteran who has investigated five-hundred murders, Mogg only picked up the Tupac cold case in 2018. He was one of several detectives to work the murder case in its third decade. Nearing retirement, Mogg planned to open a private investigator's office, according to a Metro source, after solving one last big case. "He said he wanted to go out with a bang by solving the Tupac Shakur case," one law enforcement source says.

Mogg wasn't the only person involved in the investigation who says he hadn't been aware of the proffer and recording until recently. David Roger, the Clark County district attorney from 2003 to 2012, recalls few specifics from the long-ago murder, but he's certain his office was never informed of the existence of a federal proffer by a prime suspect in such a sensational case – especially one that resulted in the ridicule of Metro for failing to bring a killer to justice. "Law-enforcement agencies have a spirit of cooperation when going after the criminal element," Roger says. "If LAPD had the authority to discuss this proffer agreement with us and chose not to, then shame on them. This was a murder investigation that was important to a lot of people, and they should have shared with us whatever information they could."

L.A. detective Poole remained suspicious of the Tupac and Biggie investigations to the end. "Murders don't go unsolved when the victim is a celebrity who gets shot dead in front of dozens of witnesses who can identify the killers," he told Sullivan. "Remind me of any recent cases where that has happened, other than Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. Murders like that go unsolved if the police don't want to solve them."

As authorities closed in on Davis during the heat of July, his own tone changed in an interview with the YouTube hip-hop channel The Art of Dialogue, admitting: "I hate that shit happened, dog. It fucked up a lot of people's lives, dude. Power to God... I wish that shit would have never happened."

ONE PERSON WHO could shed light on what happened is Knight, who currently squats in a San Diego County, California, correctional facility, serving a twenty-eight-year sentence for manslaughter after his 2015 fatal hit-and-run of friend Terry Carter. After a menacing football career at UNLV in the mid-Eighties, the Mob Piru Blood gang member parlayed bodyguard gigs into entering the music business, co-founding Death Row Records with a style that intimidated competitors and even some of his stars.

The ensuing twenty-eight years have seen Knight endure bankruptcy, beatings, multiple shootings, and prison stretches, but nothing appears to have changed his world view. In a brief, but insightful interview from the penitentiary with TMZ, Knight expressed surprise over the Davis arrest, declined to identify him or anyone, reminded his interviewer that the two had once played Pop Warner football together, and emphatically denied Anderson was the shooter. "I'm not going to take the stand and testify on somebody, for what?" Knight asked.

Special public defenders Charles Cano and Robert Arroyo, who represent Davis, declined to comment for this article, but wrote in a bail motion that the case was based on an "astounding amount of hearsay and speculative testimony" presented to the grand jury: "It cannot be said that the proof is evident and the presumption great that Duane is guilty of first-degree murder for the death of Shakur," they wrote. In a theme sure to be repeated throughout the trial, Cano and Arroyo argued, "The truthfulness of the content of the interviews was never verified. The book and interviews were done for entertainment purposes and to make money from a situation that Kading and others had already profited." In January, District Judge Carli Kierny set bail at US$750,000 and ordered home confinement for Davis pending trial.

Dayvid Figler, a veteran defence attorney and former Las Vegas special public defender, concludes after reading the grand jury

testimony that the defendant's public statements create a steep legal challenge. "The core of the case begins and theoretically ends with the various statements Duane Davis has made over the years," Figler says. "Those statements will always be admissible as evidence. Here you don't even have to rely on individuals who say that's what he told them. He did interviews that are recorded. He wrote a book and put it in his own words." Even the most capable defence team might have a hard time explaining away admissions Davis makes in his own memoir, such as, "I pulled the Glock... tossed it in the back seat. Bubble Up did the driving, Baby Lane and [Big Dre] were riding in the back." A short time later, Shakur's life was draining away in the shadow of the Strip.

Call it an extreme example of literary licence, but Davis also attempts to claim something approaching self-defence. "Tupac made an erratic move and began to reach down beneath his seat," Davis writes. "It was the first and only time in my life that I could relate to the police command, 'Keep your hands where I can see them.' Instead, Pac pulled out a strap [handgun], and that's when the fireworks started. One of my guys from the back seat grabbed the Glock and started bustin' back." Mogg testified to the grand jury that there was no evidence that either Tupac or Knight had a weapon.

A portion of Kading's damning recording was also used in Dorsey's documentary. Around the time of Davis' recorded conversation with Kading and his partner, the LAPD was facing a wrongful death lawsuit filed by Biggie's family, alleging corrupt cops were behind the murder. (That litigation was eventually dismissed.) The LAPD named Knight as a possible suspect in the Biggie shooting, but he was never charged. In his interview with Kading, all Davis would say about the Biggie hit was, "That one wasn't us."

Davis' admissions aren't the only statements he's given to authorities – and his earlier claims may be a basis of his defence. In 1997, just months after Tupac's murder, Davis denied to the FBI his involvement in the shooting. Davis adhered to this dubious version of events for the next decade – until he was once again in trouble and, once again, was approached by investigators trying to solve the killing.

At its dark heart, however, this is a murder story. The spotlight is on Duane Davis. Prosecutors say he's a hardened gangster with hurt feelings because he believes he didn't get enough credit and cash for his role in killing the voice of a generation.

Like the cops who grew winded chasing him across three decades, Davis wrote a story. Now, he's on the brink of achieving where they failed, bringing a degree of closure to – how did he put it? – "the biggest crime in Las Vegas history." This legend in his own mind never stops spinning.

Slow down, Scarface. Las Vegas is the place that venerates its murderous gambling pioneers with a museum and offers tours of the homes and businesses of the infamous. A short distance from where Tupac died is the scene of the largest mass shooting in American history. Biggest crime? Get in line. Senseless bloodletting has plenty of competition here.

Riddled with dark alleys, corrupt elements, and conspiracies, the winding Tupac murder investigation remains a noir mystery for a new generation that still threatens to embarrass law enforcement. Despite Keffe D's admissions, the biggest challenge now facing police and prosecution might be in keeping the trial from tumbling down a rabbit hole of discovery littered with conflicting evidence.

But in the end, the question remains, "Why now?" Carroll, the retired bike cop, answers the question with a question as he speaks to the frustration of many of his colleagues. "It comes to a point where, how long are we all supposed to sit by and listen to this guy brag about committing a murder and not be charged with anything?"

But as the cop who arrested Davis told the ageing gangster, "That's what court's for, right?" ®

Reviews

Music

RADIOHEAD'S SWEET SIDE HUSTLE

Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood Create Some Low-Key Majesty with The Smile

BY JON DOLAN

The Smile

Wall of Eyes

XL

THE RELEASE OF a new Radiohead album is greeted in certain circles as a kind of holy occasion, a time to drop everything and commence Deep Listening.

We have not witnessed such a hallowed event since 2016, when Radiohead dropped *A Moon Shaped Pool*, so a new album after such a wait is more than welcome. Sometimes, though, it's nice to see what the members of a great band can do when working outside such weighty expectations. That's the story of The Smile, the excellent side band Radiohead singer Thom Yorke and lead guitarist Jonny Greenwood have formed with jazz drummer Tom Skinner. On the band's 2022 debut, *A Light for Attracting Attention*, the stakes were low, and the jams were loose.

The Smile are back with *Wall of Eyes*, a lavishly gorgeous second LP.

ILLUSTRATION BY
Nicole Rifkin

→ THE SMILE

No one is going to convene a Deep Listening Consortium to unpack its meaning, and that's part of the appeal. This music drifts, and we drift with it. "I can go anywhere that I want," Yorke sings against the spacious jazz rock of ambling "Friend of a Friend," adding, "just gotta turn myself inside out."

On the album's opening title track, Greenwood unspools some acoustic lullaby strum and Yorke coos anxiously as his voice pings amid elegiacally dissolving electro-acoustic folderol. And that's pretty much it for five transfixing minutes. "Teleharmonic" is ambiguous bliss, with Yorke making like a dyspeptic soul boy as the song's crinkly whir gathers around him until the effect almost feels hymnlike. On "Under Our Pillows," Greenwood's guitar contorts and glistens as Yorke's quavering voice slips in and out of focus, then the music fades unexpectedly into an ambient wash. With its Doppler-effect drum rumble, shadowy piano, archangel strings, and Yorke's enveloping mumble-blues vocalese, "I Quit" feels relentless and distracted, a brilliant balance of opposites.

The first Smile record rocked out a little more than recent Radiohead. This one is more subdued, but there are a couple of bangers. "Read the Room" is coiled and funky, with Greenwood splaying out coolly fractured notes over Skinner's tense groove, before the song lifts off into a sublime krautrock-y zone-out.

The album's intense emotional peak is the eight-minute "Bending Hectic." Greenwood creates a little galaxy of distended shimmering notes. Yorke sets a scene of driving on a mountainside in Italy, and then "letting go of the wheel." Skinner tensely pushes the beat, Greenwood's guitar ripples ominously, and Yorke goes over the edge, narrating a moment of dread that also creepily feels like a moment of freedom. Violent strings swell, and Greenwood's guitar explodes into some of the heaviest, meanest noise he's ever conjured, mirroring the cathartic collapse Yorke is evoking. It's the kind of terrifying grandeur these guys do better than anyone else. In any package it shows up in, we'll always take it. ®

BRITTNEY SPENCER PROVES IT

A promising country star delivers a debut album worth waiting for BY JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

LIKE MOST singers new in town, Brittney Spencer spent the bulk of her first decade in Nashville paying dues. She busked to passersby, sang backup for Carrie Underwood, and carved out a space for provocative songwriting in the city's Christian-worship-music community. Then, in 2020, in the wake of country music's reckoning with its long history of racial exclusion, Spencer uploaded a viral acoustic cover of The Highwomen's "Crowded Table." Since then, she's opened for Willie Nelson and Megan Thee Stallion, sang at the CMAs, and even became an affiliate member of The Highwomen, the group whose song started it all.

But until *My Stupid Life*, a debut country record that's certain to cement Spencer's place in the genre, all of that seeming stardom had gone untested. The album takes a few songs to find its footing, but once it does, *My Stupid Life* lifts off and soars: it's hard to think of a stronger run on a country LP in recent memory than the five-song stretch beginning with the self-reclamation ballad "The Last Time" and ending with the tender heartbreak of "If You Say So." "The microwave love and toaster vows," she sings of the faltering new marriage in the latter, "can't bare the weight of us right now."

Brittney Spencer
My Stupid Life
ELEKTRA

Spencer traverses a blend of muscular pop rock, textured soul, and anthemic singalong pop, all of it grounded squarely in a genre-agnostic country that conjures Maren Morris' landmark album *Hero*. (Morris, one of Spencer's foremost champions, looms large here, adding vocals on one song, getting name-dropped in another.) Spencer has assembled an ace team to showcase her versatile voice and incisive writing, including producer Daniel Tashian (Kacey Musgraves' *Golden Hour*). The result is a record unencumbered by the need to constantly prove its Nashville bona fides, and in doing so ends up being one of the more convincing country statements in some time.

My Stupid Life is a deftly told collection of stories that, like her "Crowded Table" cover, simmer with subtext. Underneath the sugary gloss on these songs about flirting and flailing lurk layers of meaning: beneath the ode to partying at home in sweatpants on "Night In" lies the threat of "drunk boys mumbling 'Can I buy you a drink?'" The love story of "My First Rodeo" also works as a parable of a singer who's spent years being ignored in a town that hands out opportunities like coupons. Then there's the acoustic closer, "Reaching Out," a song about striving for honesty when things aren't going great. "This world is full of stories that look quite like my own," Spencer sings in a whisper.

It took too long, but thank God she's finally been given the chance to tell them. ®

JIMMY FONTAINE; FRANK LEBON

Quick Hits

Six new albums you need to know about now

Ricki-Lee
On My Own
(Black Label Entertainment)

Ricki-Lee's first record in a decade turns bitterness into beauty. From infectious harmonies on tracks like "Ghost", lyrical vindication on "What Do You Want From Me?" and "Talkin'", and a Mardis Gras-primed interpolation of KISS' "I Was Made For Loving You", Ricki-Lee's long-awaited effort is worth the wait. Known for her tone and shading, Ricki-Lee has undoubtedly created a dance floor filler collection, but kept the avenging angel vocals she's honed over her two decade-long career. Released through her own record label, *On My Own* proves the music industry polymath got to where she is for a reason. **POPPY REID**

★★★☆☆

Peter Garrett
The True North
(Sony Music Australia)

The former Midnight Oil frontman's second solo album reveals a rocker who still wants in on the game after an already storied career. It's mostly serious stuff, as you'd expect. "Innocence Parts 1 & 2" is vintage Garrett, fueled by power and passion. *The True North* won't win him any new fans, but it'll certainly keep the flame burning for Oils devotees. **LARS BRANDLE**

★★★☆☆

Pierce Brothers
Everything Is Bigger Than Me
(Ditto)

With stagecraft honed on Melbourne's Bourke Street, Pierce Brothers have perfected a rollicking brand of indie folk that wins new fans with every show. A decade of touring is brilliantly encapsulated in recent single "Bottle", but that's merely a taste of the catchy melodies, earworm hooks, charming lyricism and stunning vocal harmonies — featuring guests LULLANAS on "Wilder" — on their winning third album. **JADE KENNEDY**

★★★★☆

Royel Otis
Pratts & Pain
(Ourness)

After three EPs that have led to considerable buzz here and abroad, Sydney duo Royel Maddell and Otis Pavlovic have delivered their first LP, a collection of propulsive, danceable indie pop. The largely indiscernible lyrics don't stick, but there's enough playful sonic trickery and fizzy, feel-good melodies (see: "Sofa King") to make this a post-summer party soundtrack that mostly delivers on the hype. **JAMES JENNINGS**

★★★½☆

The Terrys
Skate Pop
(Domestic La La)

The breezy pop-rock of NSW South Coast five-piece The Terrys has won them a legion of fans since their 2020 formation, leading to a Number Three debut on the Aria Charts for first album *True Colour*. *Skate Pop* doesn't deviate much from the drinking brews, hanging with buds and smoking bud formula of LP1, although dashes of Eighties synth and a harmonica solo on the folksy "Favourite Place" show the band are still capable of adding new colours to a crowd-pleasing, if limited, palette. **JAMES JENNINGS**

★★★☆☆

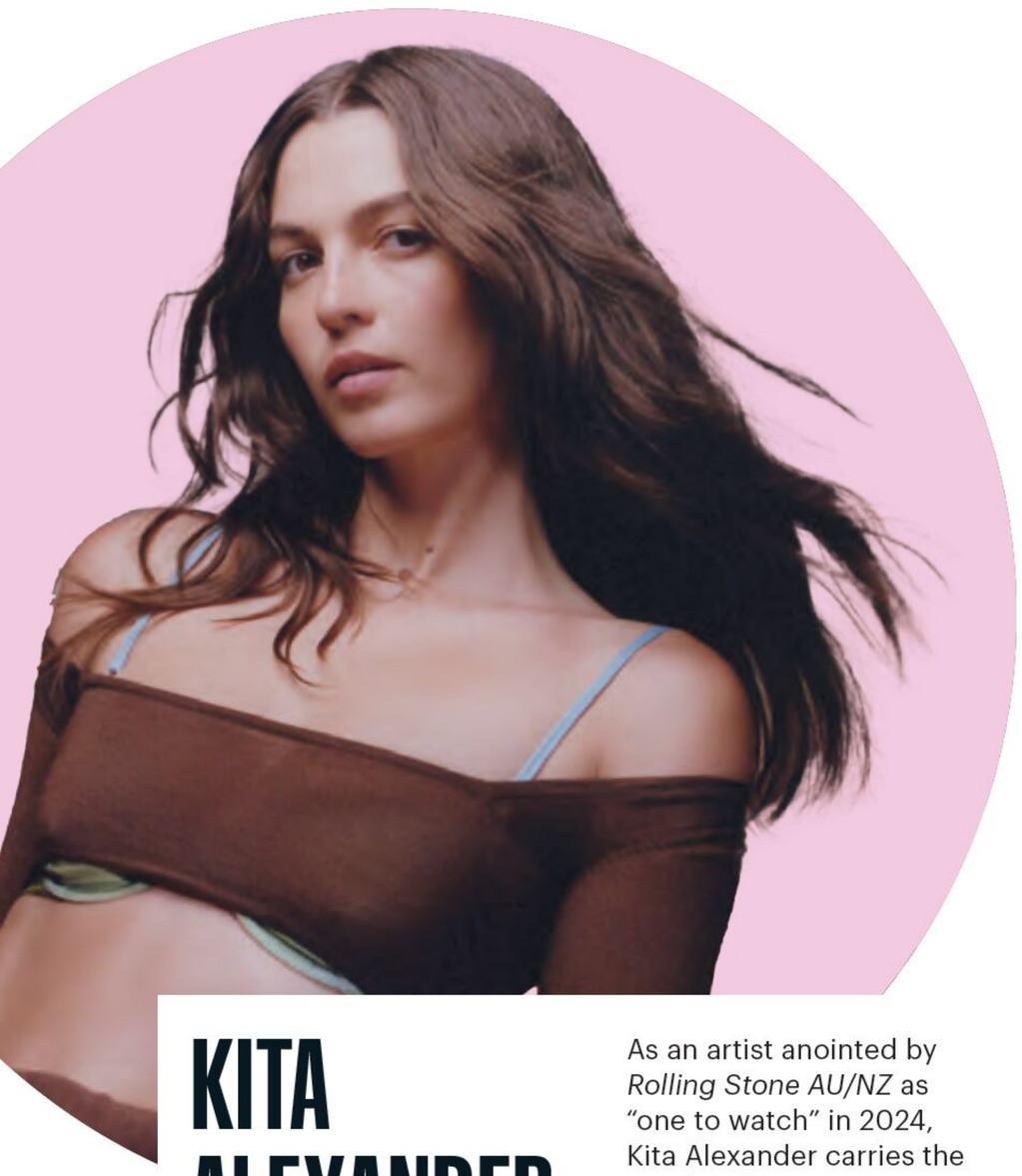
Jessica Mauboy
Yours Forever
(WMA)

Launching a brand new era oozing with courageous evocations, Jessica Mauboy makes maturity sound exhilarating. As her first release under a new label — a significant move considering her seventeen-year stint with the last — *Yours Forever* takes heartbreak and hope and explores them with intrigue. Lyrically, Mauboy proffers the light and dark of love, which will no doubt galvanise her devoted following as one of Australia's biggest pop icons. **POPPY REID**

★★★½☆

SUPPLIED; DARA MUNNIS; KANE HIBBERD

★★★★★ Classic | ★★★★ Excellent | ★★★ Good | ★★ Fair | ★ Poor
RATINGS ARE SUPERVISED BY THE EDITORS OF ROLLING STONE.



KITA ALEXANDER

Singer-songwriter's breezy pop debut

BY LARS BRANDLE

KITA ALEXANDER

Young In Love

(WMA)

★★★½☆

As an artist anointed by *Rolling Stone AU/NZ* as "one to watch" in 2024, Kita Alexander carries the weight of expectation; debut LP *Young In Love* is her confident response to the pressure.

The Byron Bay native invites us in for an exploration of life, love and the challenge of raising a kid in this weird world, all of it told over breezy pop production.

Spanning ten tracks, Kita's LP lassos the talents of country star Morgan Evans ("Date Night") and British indie artist Laurel on "All Night", a pretty-as-a-picture pop nugget.

Highlights include the single "Best You Ever Had" and "Butterflies", which is so radio-friendly it'd be a tragedy for it not to get commercial radio play.

As accomplished as it is in places, *Young In Love* is all polish, no spit. ®

L.A.B

Reggae-pop stalwarts stick to a winning formula on their sixth album

BY CONOR LOCHRIE

BEFORE THE review, an illuminating statistic: in last year's Top 20 New Zealand Albums Chart, L.A.B had an impressive four albums in the countdown, despite 2023 being marked by no new album from the all-conquering band.

What this statistic says is that any new L.A.B release is big, big news, but it also suggests that the five-piece don't have to try all that hard to garner success in Aotearoa anymore.

So, on *L.A.B VI*, it would have been understandable if L.A.B had grown somewhat complacent – even their album titles are stringently formulaic by now – but their sixth album is full of songs of formidable prowess, even if they rarely sway from the band's winning sonic recipe.

L.A.B

L.A.B VI

(Loop)

★★★½☆

Sunny reggae and pop rock abounds, as it always does on a L.A.B record, and tracks like "Give Me That Feeling" and their 2022 single, "Take Me Away" (winner of Best Single at the 2023 Panhead *Rolling Stone* Aotearoa Awards), will surely become festival and wedding circuit favourites by the time next summer rolls around. More downtempo moments elsewhere, particularly the Nineties R&B-indebted "I Believe", allow for sincere lyrical contemplation, and give lead singer Joel Shadbolt the opportunity to stretch his smooth and soulful vocals to the maximum.

Consistently releasing popular album after popular album is a difficult thing for any band to do, but L.A.B have found a formula that works for them; don't bet against *L.A.B VI* being their third consecutive chart-topping album in their home country, as well as their sixth to go platinum. Remarkable longevity, really. ®

BREAKING

The Last Dinner Party Are Ready to Party

THERE'S SOMETHING fitting about the fact that The Last Dinner Party, a five-woman band from the UK, came together during the lockdown. Their first single, last year's rapturous "Nothing Matters," sounded like ABBA on a bender. Everything about the *Wuthering Heights* pop on their debut album, *Prelude to Ecstasy*, has a similar sense of release. The Last Dinner Party have been through a gauntlet of buzz, backlash, and a gig opening for The Rolling Stones. But one thing is clear: They want to conquer a messy, enticing world that's newly open for business. **DAVID BROWNE**

SUPPLIED; LEONN WARD

JESS RIBEIRO

JESS RIBEIRO

Summer of Love

(Poison City Records)

★★★★☆

Over three critically acclaimed albums, Melbourne-based singer-songwriter Jess Ribeiro has created her own unique strain of delicate, slightly askew folk.

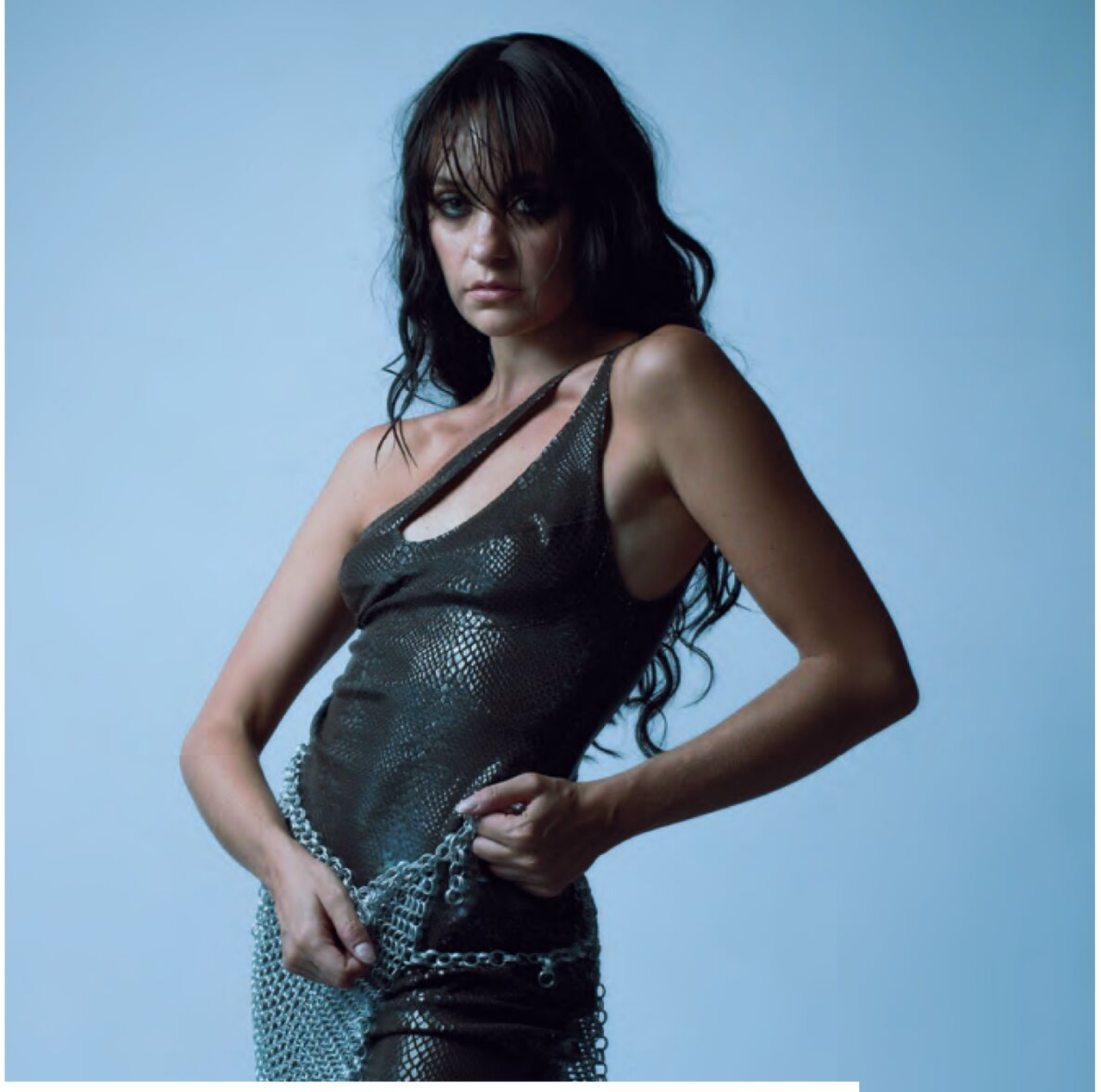
Summer of Love is both surreal and strikingly direct in equal measure, Ribeiro's voice so up front in the mix that it's like a close friend leaning in to tell you the secrets of the universe.

Recorded during the pandemic, the songs delve into themes of isolation, instability and grief.

It's not all lockdowns and depression though: "Everything Is Now" and "The Trees & Me" revel in reconnecting with nature, while the title track is a gentle plea for love.

Crack players, including Dirty Three drummer Jim White, compliment the songs perfectly, the music swirling like a storm set to break at any moment with Ribeiro fearlessly positioned at the centre.

JAMES JENNINGS



CXLOE *Alt-pop star delivers hooks galore on excellent debut* BY POPPY REID

CXLOE

Shiny New Thing

(IND)

★★★★½

CXLOE has long been one of Australia's most-watched music exports, reinventing herself at each turn without losing whatever it is that has kept us hooked since her debut in 2017. On her first long-player it's now clear just what this is – magic.

Shiny New Thing rides the maelstrom between an industry obsessed with reinvention and the need to remain authentic, tongue firmly in cheek. CXLOE revels in the cognitive dissonance, serving up a degustation of dark alt-pop in a collection that feels lived in thanks to the addictive choruses ("Flight Risk"), memorable hooks ("Cheating On Myself"), and standout production ("Stretch") of early singles.

The message is clear by the third track ("Shapeshifter"), but it's the title track that stands out among an album of standouts, toying: *"I'm begging you please, I'll do things I don't mean, to be your shiny new thing."*

WHITNEY OTTE; SUPPLIED

DARTZ *Kiwi punk rockers get rowdy* BY CONOR LOCHRIE

It's always a dangerous day to be a cold one when the Band From Wellington are around, but it's also a dangerous day to be a ramshackle Kiwi pub-slash-music venue when DARTZ are kicking about: their raucous punk rock songs are made for the live setting, to be performed wildly in front of a packed pit of ecstatic revellers.

To call DARTZ Aotearoa's answer to The Chats would be immediately correct but more generally reductive, because there's so much going on under DARTZ's furious and fun anthems: there's great wit, honest storytelling and effortless ensemble work.

Opener "Earn the Thirst" celebrates the importance of putting in the hard yards before having a beer, and it sums up DARTZ right now: they're enjoying themselves immensely after finding their hard-earned place in the New Zealand music scene.

DARTZ

Dangerous Day to Be a Cold One

(Flying Nun Records)

★★★★☆

Foster and Reis scan the ice for clues.

T.V.

THE REBIRTH OF 'TRUE DETECTIVE'

The fourth season of HBO's neo-noir delivers a gripping Arctic Circle mystery thanks to Issa López, Jodie Foster, and Kali Reis By ALAN SEPINWALL

True Detective: Night Country

NETWORK	Foxtel, Binge
AIR DATE	Streaming now
STARRING	Jodie Foster Kali Reis John Hawkes Finn Bennett Fiona Shaw Christopher Eccleston Isabella Star LaBlanc

LIZ DANVERS, chief of police in the remote Alaskan town of Ennis, and heroine of *True Detective: Night Country*, is fond of telling other cops they're asking the wrong questions, prodding them over and over until they ask the right one. With *Night Country*, there's only one question: Was it worth resurrecting the long-dormant *True Detective* franchise – and without its original creator, Nic Pizzolatto?

The new season, created, directed, and largely written by Issa López (*Tigers Are Not Afraid*), and starring Jodie Foster, answers with a resounding, "Hell, yes."

It's been a decade since the anthology cop drama's first season, starring Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson. In the moment, it seemed like a bolt from the blue, thanks primarily to McConaughey's haunted performance and the hypnotic direction of Cary Joji Fukunaga. But the ending disappointed viewers who were expecting some kind of supernatural payoff to all of the vague allusions to the horror stories of H.P. Lovecraft. Season Two, starring Colin Farrell and Rachel McAdams, was a creative disaster on nearly every front. The third season was buoyed by the performances of Mahershala Ali and Stephen Dorff, but was otherwise a forgettable rehash.

Now comes a new title, a new creator, and a very different setting, 240 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. *Night Country* injects a whole lot of female energy both onscreen – in the form of Foster and co-star Kali Reis, as Danvers' reluctant partner Evangeline Navarro – and off, into a series that in the past wasn't exactly celebrated for its use of women. The end result is a lean, mean, six-episode season that retains most of what was great under Pizzolatto, while leaving behind the more self-indulgent or outright clumsy parts of those years.

Night Country begins with Ennis entering a winter stretch of perpetual darkness. The plot – Arctic researchers disappear under mysterious circumstances, which Navarro believes is connected to an unsolved murder she once worked on with Danvers – has plenty of darkness of its own. Yet López manages to avoid letting the show be consumed by that darkness. It's an intense, often graphically violent season, but not an oppressively dour one. The energy between Foster (whose raspy growl is a perfect fit for an antisocial, my-way-or-the-highway veteran cop) and Reis (a former boxer with screen presence to spare) crackles throughout. And López manages to occasionally let some small but badly needed glimpses of light shine through, particularly when it comes to Navarro and everyone else in Ennis telling Danvers how much they dislike her.

López on the set.

After Season One, Pizzolatto admitted he was surprised by how literally some viewers took the Yellow King references, and the next two seasons mostly tried to stick to human monsters. López, on the other hand, almost gleefully accepts the challenge of telling her story in a way that allows the audience to either take what's happening as evidence that powerful spirits roam the ice up there, or treat all of the strange doings as products of the madness that can develop in such isolated, lightless conditions. When a witness is asked if he thought there was another person at a crime scene, he says, "This is Ennis, man. Yeah, you see people sometimes." It's an incredibly graceful balancing act, all the way to the end.

The Ali season came and went with minimal notice, and there hasn't been much clamouring for more over the past five years. But López makes a very convincing argument that *True Detective* can live on, passing from one storyteller to the next rather than rotely copying what's been done with it before. By the time someone directly quotes a McConaughey line in the finale, *Night Country* has already established itself as its own thrilling, nightmarish, riveting thing. ®

MICHELLE K. SHORT/HBO; LILJA JONS/HBO

SPIELBERG'S WWII EPIC MISSES MARK

In 'Masters of the Air,' Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks recruit a talented young cast to give WWII bombardiers their due By ALAN SEPINWALL

Gatwa as a Tuskegee Airman.

IN ONE EPISODE of the World War II epic, a character collapses from exhaustion and sleeps through the events of D-Day, which were so memorably featured in *Saving Private Ryan*. In another, we realise that several characters are being held in the same POW camp that was the subject of the classic Sixties film *The Great Escape*, and that our heroes had no idea the escape was happening until well after the fact.

That parts of two iconic WWII movies happen between scenes of *Masters of the Air* isn't a problem in and of itself. Steven Spielberg, who reteams as producer with Tom Hanks for a follow-up to *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, already made *Private Ryan*. But it's emblematic of a larger issue with the new project, where key story points and character arcs keep happening offscreen.

Masters of the Air

NETWORK	Apple TV+
AIR DATE	Streaming now
STARRING	Austin Butler Callum Turner Barry Keoghan Anthony Boyle Nate Mann Ncuti Gatwa Josiah Cross

Adapted by *Band* veteran John Orloff from the book by Donald L. Miller, *Masters* tells the story of the 100th Bomb Group, a unit of soldiers who performed bombing raids over Germany. Their planes are called B-17 Flying Fortresses, even though they seem awfully vulnerable on missions that are considered successful if half of the crews return alive. (Once, only a single crew survives.)

Early on, one pilot complains that a friend didn't warn him about how horrifying each flight would be. "I didn't know what to say," the friend admits. "You've seen it now." But the first pilot replies, "I don't know what I saw." This is a consistent problem with *Masters*. We can tell what's happening, since the aerial battles are gorgeous, but not always to whom it's happening. *Band* sometimes ran into trouble distinguishing between a bunch of pasty guys wearing the same uniform. To that, *Masters* adds oxygen masks and flight caps, which make it all but impossible to keep track of who just got shot, or even which plane we're currently seeing.

It's a running gag that best pals Gale Cleven (Austin Butler) and John Egan (Callum Turner) are nicknamed Buck and Bucky, respectively. But at a certain point, the soldiers are so interchangeable that they may as well all be called Bucky. Even when we can see their faces and hair, they're defined by one character trait, maybe two. Buck is easygoing. Rosie (Nate Mann) is too dedicated to the job. Crosby (Anthony Boyle) suffers from airsickness and low self-esteem. Curt (Barry Keoghan) is... from New York? Bucky is the most compelling, largely because of the big Adam Driver energy Turner is giving.

Where *Band* perhaps had too many characters, it was still telling a contained story about a single company of paratroopers. As *Masters* continues, the story keeps splitting its focus between the 100th's missions, downed crew members trying to evade capture in France, the POW camp, and more. The penultimate episode introduces the Tuskegee Airmen, a hallowed group of Black fighter pilots (one played by Ncuti Gatwa). It's admirable in theory that these previously all-white productions are trying to be more inclusive. But the Tuskegee pilots are brought in so late – and are so tangential – that it plays as tokenism. By trying to tell so many different stories at once, *Masters* does a disservice to almost all of them. When people make big decisions, we're often left guessing as to why. And when some of them die, it doesn't sting that much because we barely knew them.

Parts of it are absolutely stunning to look at, and parts are emotionally effective, pure Dad TV. So this is less a misfire than a disappointment. *Band* has become an annual viewing tradition for many. *The Pacific* is too harrowing to invite that kind of repeat viewing, but once is all you need to appreciate how powerfully its story is told. *Masters of the Air* ultimately lacks the adventurous spirit of the former and the emotional gravity of the latter. Unlike the precision bombardiers of the 100th, it only occasionally hits its target. ®

Butler is ready for battle.

CHUCK HODES/FX, 2

Chloë Sevigny

On working with Ryan Murphy, mean writers, and parenthood

The tagline for *Feud: Capote vs. The Swans* is "The Original Housewives." Do you watch any *Real Housewives*?
I have never watched a single episode of a single *Housewife*. I don't know who any of them are.

As an actor, what's it like to play in the Ryan Murphy pond?

> ***'Feud: Capote vs. The Swans' is streaming on Binge.***

He's so prolific. I remember when I was first offered *American Horror Story*, it was still Facebook-y days, and I looked it up and saw that all my old alternative weirdo friends were into the show. I was like, "OK, this feels right."

In the show, the Swans meet for regular gossipy lunches. Do you have any regular routines with your girlfriends?
I used to have these girls' nights where I'd only have girlfriends over and we'd drink martinis and talk shit, but that hasn't happened as much now that the small person is always around my house and never leaves [laughs]. One of my New Year's resolutions was to start carving out more time for friends.

Your Jay McInerney *New Yorker* profile will turn thirty this fall. How do you feel about it?
It was so odd to be written about before you were even famous for anything, you know? That was the hard part about it for me: I didn't really understand why it was happening. In retrospect, I can, and I think it's interesting to follow a girl who's coming into her own, but at the time, I didn't feel it was justified. I was like, "Why am I even doing this?" [McInerney] promised to buy me this dress, and my father read *The New Yorker*.

This season of *Feud* is all about Truman Capote writing scandalous, exaggerated things about his female friends. Has anyone ever written anything particularly egregious about you?
There was someone who used to write for the [*New York Times*] Style section, Bob Morris. It was very hurtful, and he wrote some really ugly things. I still think about it. He was like, "She's not that attractive, she's not that smart, and she's not that good at acting." When you're twenty years old and you read that, you're like, "Huh?!"

You had your baby at forty-five in May 2020, at the height of the pandemic. What was that like?
It's amazing just to have a baby. I didn't think it was going to happen for me, and then to have this thing... I can't imagine life without him. And like I said, he just never leaves. He's always around here. I had tried other avenues and not had luck with them, so to naturally conceive at that age is kind of a miracle.

What's the best advice you've ever received?
I don't really have an answer for that. I think there are things you learn as you go along, like comparing and despairing and how unhealthy that is, and running your own race. They're all truisms but feel trite to say out loud, so I'm always kind of "Ugh."

What style advice would you give people?
Style is so personal. There are people that say "Less is more," but I don't know if that's necessarily true. I think whatever is true for you and makes you feel best.

Do you have favorite films that you've been in? There are so many good ones.
I like the impact that *Gummo* has had on young people. That makes people think differently about movies. It might not be my favorite performance, per se. Also, *Boys Don't Cry*, in terms of the social impact that it had. It's so rare to do something that's so moving, eye-opening, and hopefully changes people's consciousness.

How do you feel about the state of New York City? It's increasingly a city for the rich.
Yeah. The athleisure and the dogs are taking over. Everybody's in Lululemon and has a fucking dog, and it's driving me crazy. I'm sorry, dog lovers. There are too many of you. I'm not going out to clubs in Ridgewood, so I'm sure it's there somewhere. I hope there are [cool] places for people to go when they want to.

MARLOW STERN

ILLUSTRATION BY **Mark Summers**

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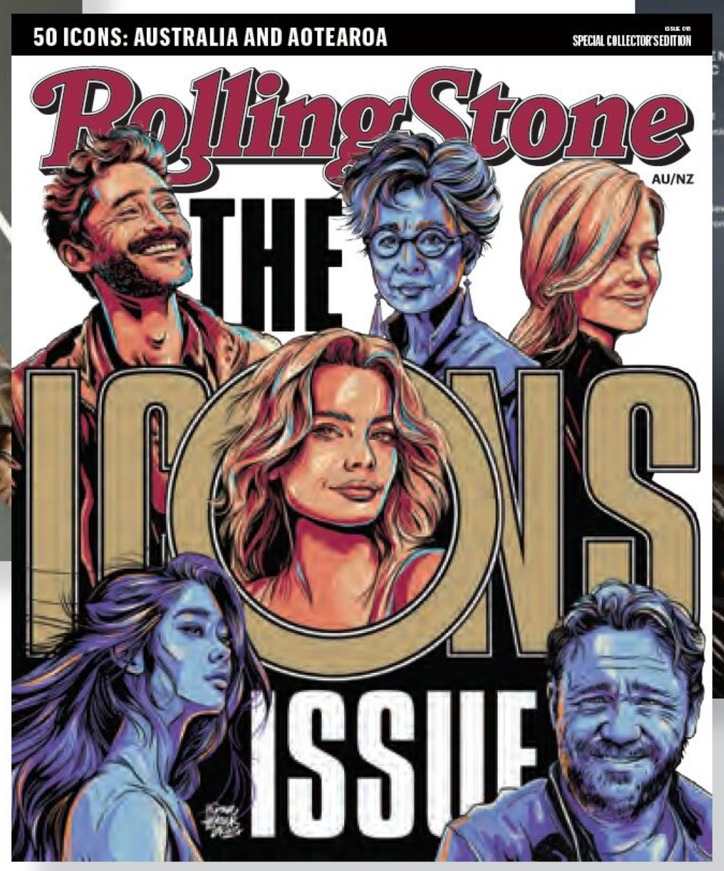

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